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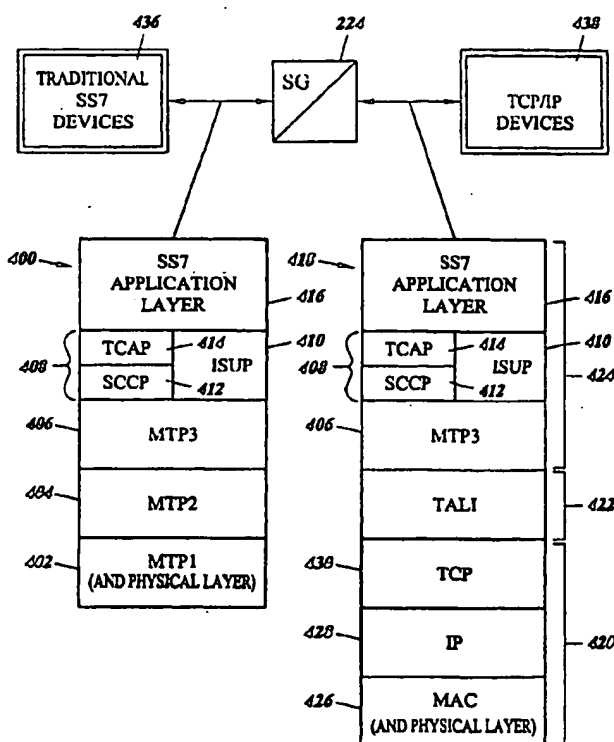
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(54) Title: METHODS AND SYSTEMS FOR COMMUNICATING SS7 MESSAGES OVER PACKET-BASED NETWORK USING TRANSPORT ADAPTER LAYER INTERFACE



(57) Abstract: A transport adapter layer interface (TALI) (422) includes messages, processes, and packet structures for sending and receiving SS7 (416) information over a stream-oriented connection, such as a TCP/IP (428, 430) connection. For example, the TALI interface includes test messages for testing the status of a connection and allow and prohibit messages for enabling and disabling service data communications without invoking a TCP handshaking procedure. The TALI interface also includes SYNC and LENGTH fields for facilitating extraction of individual message packets over a stream-oriented connection.

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Description

5       METHODS AND SYSTEMS FOR COMMUNICATING SS7 MESSAGES  
OVER PACKET-BASED NETWORK USING TRANSPORT ADAPTER  
LAYER INTERFACE

Related Applications

10       This application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application  
Serial No. 09/443,712 filed November 19, 1999, and further claims the  
benefit of U.S. Provisional Application Serial No. 60/137,988 filed June 7,  
1999, the disclosures of both of which are incorporated herein by reference  
in their entirety.

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Technical Field

The present invention relates to methods and systems for  
communicating SS7 messages over a packet-based network. More  
particularly, the present invention relates to methods and systems for  
20       communicating SS7 messages over a packet-based network using a  
transport adapter layer interface.

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Background Art

The traditional public switched telephone network (PSTN) consists of signaling nodes connected via dedicated signaling system 7 (SS7) signaling links. The three primary types of signaling nodes in the conventional PSTN network are service switching points (SSPs), signal transfer points (STPs), and service control points (SCPs). Service switching points are end office switches that handle both voice and data traffic. Signal transfer points are switching nodes that route SS7 messages between SS7 signaling points. Service control points are databases and associated computers that provide data in response to SS7 queries. Examples of such data include billing information, 800 number translation information, and number portability information.

These conventional SS7 nodes have typically communicated by sending SS7 messages to each other over dedicated SS7 signaling links. While such signaling links provide a highly reliable means for communicating SS7 traffic, SS7 signaling links provide only fixed bandwidth to a user regardless of the user's needs. As a result, users must install or lease sufficient call signaling bandwidth to handle peak or worst-case traffic conditions. Installing or leasing sufficient call signaling bandwidth for peak conditions is inefficient since peak conditions rarely occur. Moreover, because SS7 call signaling bandwidth is expensive, there exists a need for an alternative to dedicated SS7 signaling links.

Figure 1 is a block diagram of the conventional PSTN network. In Figure 1, SSPs 100 and 102 communicate with SSPs 104 and 106 through

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STPs 108, 110, 112, and 114. SCP database nodes 116 and 120 provide data in response to queries from SSPs 100, 102, 104 and 106 and/or from STPs 108, 110, 112, and 114. All of the lines interconnecting the nodes in Figure 1 represent conventional SS7 signaling links. As stated above, such links are often under-utilized and are expensive to install or lease.

In packet-based networks, such as transmission control protocol/Internet protocol (TCP/IP) networks, bandwidth can be shared among multiple users. In addition, the growth and popularity of the global Internet have made components for such networks readily available and cost efficient. However, integrating the traditional PSTN network with a packet-based network, such as a TCP/IP network, creates a number of problems.

For example, one problem with sending traditional call signaling traffic over a TCP/IP network is that in a TCP/IP network, transmissions between a sender and a receiver are stream-oriented. That is, TCP software on a sending machine is not guaranteed to send data in the same boundaries defined by a sending application. The amount of data sent over a TCP connection depends on the window size advertised by the receiver, the number of bytes of data that have been acknowledged by the receiver, and the maximum segment size of the physical network connecting the sender and the receiver. Accordingly, the receiving application may not receive data in the same boundaries created by the sending application. Thus, when sending call signaling messages over a TCP/IP network, several messages may be combined in one TCP segment. Alternatively, a single call signaling message may be divided among multiple TCP segments. In conventional

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networks, it is the job of the receiving application to parse the incoming data stream and extract the individual packets. Such parsing is difficult and increases the complexity of application programs that utilize TCP.

Another problem with sending conventional call signaling messages  
5 over a TCP/IP connection is that the timeout period for disabling a connection in TCP is too long for call signaling applications. For example, some implementations of TCP include a keep-alive timer. The keep-alive timer is reset every time a TCP segment is received. When the timer expires, it causes one side of the connection to determine if the other side is  
10 still operating. No mechanism is specified in the TCP protocol specifications for determining whether the other side is operating. In addition, the timeout period for the keep-alive timer is on the order of minutes. Thus, one side of a connection could go down and the other side could wait for minutes before resetting the connection. Such a long timeout period wastes resources on  
15 the machine that is waiting for data from the other side and is unsuitable for telephony applications.

Yet another problem with integrating conventional telephony and packet-based networks, such as TCP/IP networks, is that TCP/IP requires lengthy handshake procedures for connection establishment and  
20 termination. For example, in order to establish a TCP connection, a client application sends a synchronization (SYN) packet to a server application. The server application then sends an acknowledgement (ACK) and a SYN back to the client. The client then sends an acknowledgement to the SYN + ACK from the server. During the initial exchange of SYN and ACK

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messages, the client and server exchange sequence numbers. Once the client sends acknowledgement to the SYN + ACK to the server, the TCP software on the client machine is in an open state in which data can be received from the server and data from the sending application can be sent  
5 to the server.

In order to terminate a TCP connection, when an application closes a connection, the TCP software associated with that application sends a FIN packet to the TCP software on the other side of the connection. The TCP software of the machine that receives the FIN sends an ACK to the FIN and  
10 informs the application that a FIN has been received. If the application is finished sending data, the application closes the connection. In response to the application close, the TCP software sends a FIN to the TCP software that sent the original FIN. In response to receiving the FIN, the TCP software sends an ACK. Once this ACK is sent, the connection is  
15 considered to be closed by both sides of the connection.

While TCP connection establishment and termination procedures have proven to be reliable and account for a variety of error conditions, such procedures are cumbersome and require many round trip times in order to complete. For example, in TCP connection establishment, a minimum of 1.5  
20 round trip times is required. In the TCP connection termination scenario described above, at least two round trip times are required. In addition, TCP software on both sides of the connection is required to maintain state and perform additional processing during connection establishment and termination.

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For all of these reasons, the number of occurrences of TCP connection establishment and termination procedures should be minimized. For example, if it is desired to upgrade software in a telephony device that currently communicates with a remote device over a TCP connection, the  
5 connection must be terminated. Connection termination requires the handshaking procedure discussed above. Once the software is upgraded, the connection must be reestablished. Connection reestablishment requires the three-way handshaking procedure described above. Thus, performing a software upgrade requires an initial TCP connection establishment, a TCP  
10 connection termination, followed by another TCP connection establishment. These procedures waste resources and should be minimized, especially in high-traffic telecommunications switches.

In light of all these difficulties associated with integrating conventional telephony networks, such as SS7 networks, and stream-oriented packet-  
15 based networks, such as TCP networks, there exists a need for novel methods and systems for integrating these networks that avoid at least some of the difficulties associated with the prior art.

#### Disclosure of the Invention

20 The present invention includes methods and systems for communicating SS7 messages between signaling nodes over a packet-based network using a transport adapter layer interface. As used herein, the phrase transport adapter layer interface refers to an interface that resides above the transport layer in the TCP protocol stack that facilitates integration



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between the SS7 protocol stack and the TCP/IP protocol stack. Such an interface includes functionality for prohibiting and allowing communications over a socket without invoking conventional TCP connection establishment and termination handshaking procedures. In addition, the interface provides  
5 monitor and test messages that are respectively used to measure performance and test the status of a connection. The interface also provides a mechanism for encapsulating SS7 messages that allows individual message identification over a stream-oriented connection.

Embodiments of the invention will be described below as modules,  
10 layers, or processes for implementing SS7 and IP communications functions. It is understood that these modules, layers, or processes can be implemented as hardware, software, or a combination of hardware and software. For example, transport adapter layer interface functionality is described below as a process implemented on a data communications  
15 module. The data communications module may include hardware, such as a microprocessor and associated memory, for executing and storing programs. The TALI process may be executed by the microprocessor to perform the TALI functions described below.

Accordingly, it is an object of the invention to provide novel methods  
20 and systems for communicating SS7 messages over a stream-oriented packet-based network that avoids the problems with conventional stream-oriented packet-based networks.

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It is another object of the invention to provide methods and systems for allowing and prohibiting service data communications over a stream-oriented connection without invoking a TCP handshaking procedure.

It is yet another object of the invention to provide methods and  
5 systems for identifying message packets received over a stream-oriented connection.

Some of the objects of the invention having been stated hereinabove, other objects will be evident as the description proceeds, when taken in connection with the accompanying drawings as best described hereinbelow.

10

#### Brief Description of the Drawings

Preferred embodiments of the invention will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings of which:

Figure 1 is a block diagram illustrating the conventional PSTN network;

15

Figure 2 is a block diagram of an exemplary operating environment for embodiments of the present invention;

Figure 3 is a block diagram of a signaling gateway capable of sending SS7 messages over a packet-based network using a transport adapter layer interface according to an embodiment of the present invention;

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Figures 4(a) and 4(b) are block diagrams illustrating the relationships between the SS7 and IP protocol stacks and methods for integrating the protocol stacks using a transport adapter layer interface according to embodiments of the present invention;

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Figure 5 is a block diagram illustrating an exemplary packet structure for encapsulating of SCCP messages using a transport adapter layer interface according to an embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 6 is a flowchart illustrating exemplary steps that may be performed by a signaling gateway in encapsulating SCCP messages using a transport adapter layer interface according to an embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 7 is a block diagram illustrating an exemplary packet structure for encapsulating MTP3 messages using a transport adapter layer interface according to an embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 8 is a block diagram illustrating an exemplary packet structure for encapsulating SS7 messages using an ATM adaption layer and a transport adapter layer interface according to an embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 9 is a flowchart illustrating exemplary steps for identifying individual message packets received over a stream-oriented connection according to an embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 10 is a flowchart illustrating exemplary steps for monitoring connection status using transport adapter layer interface messages according to an embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 11 is a flowchart illustrating exemplary steps for allowing and prohibiting communications using a transport adapter layer interface according to embodiments of the present invention; and

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Figure 12 is a flowchart illustrating exemplary steps for measuring round trip time using transport adapter layer interface messages according to an embodiment of the present invention.

5                    Detailed Description of the Invention

Figure 2 illustrates an exemplary operating environment for embodiments of the present invention. In Figure 2, conventional SS7 network elements, such as SSPs 200, 202, and 204 and SCP 206, communicate with each other over SS7 network 208. IP nodes, such as  
10 media gateways (MGs) 210, 212, and 214, media gateway controllers (MGCs) 216 and 218 and Internet service provider (ISP) 220, communicate with each other over first packet-based network 222. Similarly, signaling gateways 224 and 226 communicate with MGCs 216 and 218 and with SCP 228 via second packet-based network 230. First and second packet-based  
15 networks 222 and 230 may each comprise IP networks. Moreover, first and second packet-based networks 222 and 230 may be the same logical network. The reason that networks 222 and 230 are illustrated separately in Figure 2 is that first packet-based network 222 carries packetized media stream communications between MGs, and media control information  
20 between MGCs and MGs, and second packet-based network 230 carries call signaling traffic to and from SGs 224 and 226.

The conventional SS7 network elements, such as SSPs and SCPs, are described in detail above. Hence a description thereof will not be repeated herein. The additional network elements illustrated in Figure 2

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include media gateways 210, 212, and 214, media gateway controllers 216 and 218, signaling gateways 224, and 226, and Internet service provider (ISP) 220. Media gateways 210, 212, and 214 encapsulate media stream communications, such as audio, video, and data, in IP packets to be  
5 transmitted over first packet-based network 222. An example of a protocol used to send media stream communications over a packet-based network is the real time protocol (RTP) as defined in RFC 1889, RTP: A Transport Protocol for Real Time Applications, Jacobson et al., January 1996.

MGCs 216 and 218 control MGs 210, 212, and 214 using a control  
10 protocol. An example of a control protocol that may be implemented by MGCs 216 and 218 is the media gateway control protocol as described in Media Gateway Control Protocol (MGCP), <http://search.ietf.org/internet-drafts/draft-huitema-mejaco-mgcp-v0r1-05.txt>, February 21, 1999. ISP 220 provides Internet services to subscribers. Accordingly, ISP 220 may include  
15 a network access server to provide user access to the Internet.

Signaling gateways 224 and 226 implement an interface between SS7 network 208 and second packet-based network 230. In a preferred embodiment of the invention, signaling gateways 224 and 226 provide a transport adapter layer interface to allow conventional network elements,  
20 such as SSPs 200, 202, and 204, to communicate with IP network elements, such as MGCs 216 and 218. However, the transport adapter layer interface is not limited to communications between SSPs and MGCs. For example, the transport adapter layer interface according to embodiments of the present invention may also be used to communicate call signaling messages

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to IP-based SCPs, such as SCP 228 and other devices equipped with an IP interface.

Figure 3 is a block diagram illustrating a signaling gateway for implementing transport adapter layer interface functionality according to an embodiment of the present invention. In Figure 3, signaling gateway 224 includes SS7 link interface module (LIM) 300 for sending and receiving SS7 messages over an SS7 network and data communications module (DCM) 302 for sending and receiving SS7 messages over one or more stream-oriented connections. Signaling gateway 224 may also include additional modules, such as database service module (DSM) 304, for providing SCCP and database services. Modules 300, 302 and 304 are connected by an interprocessor message transport (IMT) bus 306. IMT bus 306 is preferably a dual ring counter rotating bus for increased reliability.

Link interface module 300 includes a number of processes for sending and receiving SS7 messages over SS7 links. In the illustrated embodiment, link interface module 300 includes MTP level 1 and 2 process 307 for performing SS7 layer 1 and 2 processing of incoming messages. I/O queue 308 enqueues incoming and outgoing SS7 messages. Message discrimination process 309 determines whether incoming messages are addressed to signaling gateway 224 or to another node. For example, message discrimination process 309 may analyze the SS7 destination point code in an incoming message to determine whether the message is addressed to signaling gateway 224 or to another node. If message discrimination process 309 determines that the message is addressed to

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signaling gateway 224. message discrimination process 309 forwards the message to message distribution process 310. Message distribution process 310 routes the message to another internal module for further processing.

5       DSM 304 provides database and SCCP service for SS7 messages. Accordingly, DSM 304 may include signaling connection routing control (SCRC) and SCCP processes 312 and 314 for interpreting SCCP layer information of incoming messages and routing the messages to database process 316. Database process 316 may perform a lookup in database 318  
10   to obtain routing or other information for an incoming message. For example, database 318 may be a number portability database, a circuit identification code routing database, a billing code database, or other database for performing routing or other functionality. Routing process 320 routes the message to the appropriate module for outgoing processing  
15   based on MTP layer 3 information in the message.

DCM 302 includes transport adapter layer interface process 322 for performing transport adapter layer interface functionality. Such functionality includes encapsulating SS7 messages in a transport adapter layer interface packet to be sent over a stream-oriented connection, allowing and  
20   prohibiting communication over a stream-oriented connection, monitoring the other end of the stream-oriented connection, etc. DCM 302 preferably also includes a stream-oriented communication process such as TCP/IP process 324. TCP/IP process 324 performs conventional TCP/IP protocol stack

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functions. Such functions include reliable delivery of TCP/IP packets, flow control, packet sequencing, and other stream-oriented transport functionality.

Figure 4(a) is a block diagram illustrating the relationships between the SS7 protocol stack and the transport adapter layer interface protocol stack according to an embodiment of the present invention. In Figure 4, SS7 protocol stack 400 includes MTP layer 1 402, MTP layer 2 404, and MTP layer 3 406. MTP layer 1 402, also referred to as the physical layer, communicates with hardware to send and receive data over a physical medium. MTP layer 2 404, referred to as the data link layer, provides error correction/detection and properly sequenced delivery of SS7 message packets. MTP layer 3 406, also referred to as the network layer, is responsible for SS7 message routing, message discrimination, and message distribution.

Residing above MTPs layers 1 – 3 is the user parts and application parts layer 408. User parts and application parts layer 408 is divided into ISDN user part (ISUP) layer 410, signaling connection control part (SCCP) layer 412 and transaction capabilities application part (TCAP) layer 414. ISDN user part layer 410 performs SS7 call setup and call teardown functions. SCCP layer 412 performs signaling connection control part functions, such as database subsystem addressing. TCAP layer 414 is used for database transactions, such as 800 number translations, number portability transactions, and billing transactions. Finally, SS7 application layer 416 can perform any function that uses the underlying services



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provided by SS7. Examples of such applications include billing applications, network monitoring applications, etc.

TALI protocol stack 418 includes IP protocol stack portion 420, TALI portion 422, and SS7 portion 424. IP protocol stack portion 420 includes a physical and MAC layer 426, a network layer 428, and a transport layer 430. Physical and MAC layer 426 interfaces with network hardware for communication between connected machines and transports network frames between machines connected to the same network. Network layer 428 handles routing and addressing of datagrams between different physical networks. In a preferred embodiment of the invention, network layer 428 performs addressing and routing functions according to the Internet protocol, such as Internet protocol version 4 or Internet protocol version 6. Transport layer 430 provides communication between application programs. In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, transport layer 430 includes stream-oriented transport software, such as TCP software, for implementing reliable stream-oriented transport between applications.

It should be noted that although TALI protocol stack 418 illustrated in Figure 4(a) includes MTP3 layer 406, MTP layer 3 functionality, other than processing point codes, is optional and may be omitted from TALI protocol stack 418.

According to an important aspect of the present invention, transport adapter layer interface portion 422 includes functions and packet structures that facilitate interoperability between the SS7 and TCP protocols. For example, transport adapter layer interface portion 422 includes packet

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structures that facilitate extraction of SS7 packets from a TCP data stream, commands for allowing and prohibiting connections without invoking TCP connection establishment and termination procedures, monitor messages for measuring round trip time, and test messages for determining whether a  
5 TCP connection is enabled or disabled. Each of these functions will be discussed in more detail below.

Traditional SS7 devices 436, such as SSPs, STPs, and SCPs, communicate with signaling gateway 224 using SS7 protocol stack 400. TCP/IP devices 438, such as MGCs and IP-based SCPs, communicate with  
10 signaling gateway 224 using TALI protocol stack 418. Accordingly, signaling gateway 224 preferably includes software for implementing both SS7 protocol stack 400 and TALI protocol stack 418.

As illustrated in Figure 3, SS7 protocol stack 400 may be implemented by or on LIM 300 and TALI protocol stack 418 may be  
15 implemented by or on DCM 302. However, the present invention is not limited to such an implementation. For example, in an alternative embodiment of the invention, SS7 protocol stack 400 and TALI protocol stack 418 may be implemented on a single card or module within signaling gateway 224 or in another node in which SS7 and IP communication  
20 capability is desirable.

Figure 4(b) is a block diagram illustrating an alternative implementation of the TALI protocol stack according to an embodiment of the present invention. In Figure 4(b), SS7 protocol stack 400a includes MTP3, SCCP, TCAP, ISUP, and application layers 406, 412, 414, and 416

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that are identical to the correspondingly numbered layers described with respect to Figure 4(a). However, in Figure 4(b) MTP layers 1 and 2 are replaced by asynchronous transport mode (ATM) layer 450, ATM adaption layer 5 452, and signaling ATM adaption layer 454. Layers 450, 452, and 454 perform functions for transmitting SS7 traffic over a broadband network, such as an ATM network.

TALI protocol stack 418a includes MAC, network, transport, TALI, and SS7 layers 426, 428, 430, 422, and 424, that are identical to the correspondingly numbered layers described with respect to Figure 4(a).  
10 However, TALI protocol stack 418a includes signaling ATM adaption layer (SAAL) 454 to provide sequencing of SS7 data transferred across a TCP/IP connection. When TALI protocol stack 418a is implemented without SAAL layer 454, as illustrated in Figure 4(a), the SS7 sequence number, which is included in the SS7 MTP2 header, is not transferred across a TCP/IP  
15 connection. This sequence number is used to preserve message sequencing and to support complex SS7 procedures involving MSU retrieval during link changeover and changeback. Changeover is an SS7 procedure whereby a link request is sent over one SS7 link to move SS7 traffic from that link to another SS7 link. Changeback is an SS7 procedure for moving  
20 the SS7 traffic back to the original link. TALI protocol stack 418 illustrated in Figure 4(a) without SAAL layer 454 still guarantees correct sequencing of SS7 data because TCP layer 430 provides sequencing of TCP segments that carry the SS7 traffic.

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When TALI protocol stack 418a is implemented with SAAL layer 454, the sequence number of the SS7 MSU is part of the data transferred across a TCP/IP connection. This sequence number may be included as a header, a trailer, or in any other portion of a transport adapter layer interface packet.

5 In the illustrated example, the sequence number is a 24-bit value included in a service specific connection oriented protocol (SSCOP) trailer provided by SAAL layer 454. This 24-bit sequence number serves the same purpose as the 8-bit SS7 sequence number. Accordingly, TALI protocol stack 418a illustrated in Figure 4(b) can be used for SS7 changeover and changeback

10 with data retrieval and can minimize MSU loss when SS7 links are deactivated.

#### SCCP Encapsulation Using TALI

Figure 5 illustrates a packet structure for encapsulating SCCP MSUs in IP packets using the transport adapter layer interface according to an

15 embodiment of the present invention. In Figure 5, SS7 MSU 500 includes SCCP layer information 502 and TCAP layer information 504 that are encapsulated in service portion 506 of TALI packet 508. SS7 MSU 500 also includes service indicator octet 510 and routing label 512. In one

20 embodiment of the invention, service indicator octet 510 and routing label 512 may be encapsulated directly in service portion 506 of TALI packet 508. However, in the illustrated embodiment, service indicator octet 510 and routing label 512 are omitted from TALI packet 508. Omitting the service

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indicator octet and routing label information from the TALI packet simplifies processing by the receiving TALI process.

Rather than encapsulating service indicator octet 510 and routing label 512 directly in service field 506 of TALI packet 508, TALI protocol software according to embodiments of the present invention may store information from SIO 510 and routing label 512 in other information fields. For example, the destination point code from routing label 512 may be stored in the SCCP called party point code field of SCCP layer 502. Similarly, the originating point code from routing label 512 may be stored in the SCCP calling party point code field of routing label 512. Message type identification information from SIO 510 may be merged to OPCODE field 514 of TALI packet 508. For example, OPCODE field 514 may store information for identifying the message type. In the illustrated embodiment, OPCODE field 514 may be set to a predetermined value for identifying the message as an SCCP message. The remaining fields of SS7 MSU 500 are preferably omitted from TALI packet 508. That is, SS7 layer 2 information, opening flags, closing flags, and frame check sequences are preferably omitted from TALI packet 508. This information can be omitted because the TCP/IP protocol stack provides analogous functions to SS7 layers 1 and 2. Omitting SS7 layers 1 and 2 from TALI packet 508 decreases overhead for sending packets over a network.

In addition to service field 506 and OPCODE field 514, TALI packet 508 also includes LENGTH field 516 and SYNC field 518. LENGTH field 516 specifies the length of the service portion of the data packet. SYNC field

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518 contains a predetermined bit sequence for identifying the start of TALI packet 508. LENGTH field 516 and SYNC field 518 may be used by receiving TALI protocol software to extract individual TALI packets from a stream-oriented connection. Thus, the TALI packet structure in Figure 5  
5 solves the problem of receiving data over a stream-oriented communication and delivers individual TALI packets to an application. This simplifies application design, as will be discussed in more detail below.

TALI packet 508 is encapsulated in data portion 520 of network frame 522. Network frame 522 may be any suitable frame for delivering packets to  
10 machines connected to the same network. For example, network frame 522 may be an Ethernet frame. Accordingly, network frame 522 includes a mediated access control (MAC) header 524. IP header 526 follows MAC header 524. Finally, TCP header 528 follows IP header 526. The structure of headers 524, 526, and 528 is known to those of ordinary skill in the art  
15 and need not be described herein.

Figure 6 is a flowchart illustrating exemplary steps that may be performed by TALI process 322 illustrated in Figure 3 for performing TALI encapsulation of an SCCP MSU. In Figure 6, in step ST1, TALI process 322 receives an SS7 MSU. The SS7 MSU may originate from an SS7 node,  
20 such as an SSP. In step ST2, TALI process 322 discards MTP layer 2 information, SRC, and flags from the SCCP MSU. In step ST3, TALI process 322 places the destination point code from the routing layer into the called party address field of the SCCP layer. In step ST4, TALI process 322 places the originating point code from the routing label in the calling party

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address field of the SCCP layer. It is understood that steps ST3 and ST4 are optional and can be omitted if the entire MTP3 portion of the SCCP MSU is encapsulated in the service portion of the TALI packet.

In step ST5, TALI process 322 sets the SYNC field in the header of the TALI packet to indicate the beginning of the TALI packet. In ST6, TALI process 322 sets the OP CODE field of the TALI packet to SCCP. In step ST7, TALI process 322 sets the LENGTH field is set to the number of octets in the service field of the TALI packet. Finally, in step ST8, TALI process 322 sends the packet to TCP/IP process 324 for TCP/IP encapsulation and transmission to an external node.

The steps for processing an incoming TALI packet are essentially the reverse of the steps illustrated in Figure 6. Novel steps for processing incoming TALI packets will be discussed in more detail below in the section entitled "Identifying Individual Message Packets Received Over Stream-Oriented Connection."

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MTP3 Encapsulation Using TALI

Figure 7 is a block diagram illustrating an exemplary packet structure for encapsulating MTP3 messages in IP packets according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. As used herein, an MTP3 message is an SS7 message that is not an SCCP or an ISUP message. These messages correspond to service indicator values of 0 – 2, 4, and 6 – 15. In Figure 7, SS7 MSU 700 includes layer 2 702, layer 3 703, and opening and closing information 704 and 706. Unlike the example illustrated in Figure 5, in this example, all of layer 3 information is encapsulated in service portion 506 of TALI packet 508. Like the example illustrated in Figure 5, layer 2 information 702, and opening and closing information 704 and 706 are preferably discarded.

In TALI packet 508, LENGTH field 516 is set to the length of service portion 506. OPCODE field 514 is set to a predetermined value for identifying an MTP3 packet. SYNC field 518 is set to a predetermined value for identifying the start of TALI packet 508. TALI packet 508 is encapsulated in network frame 522 in the same manner described above with respect to Figure 5. Thus, the present invention provides a method for encapsulating MTP3 messages other than ISUP and SCCP messages in network frames using a transport adapter layer interface.

SAAL Encapsulation Using TALI

As illustrated above with regard to Figure 4(b), one embodiment of the transport adapter layer interface protocol stack includes a SAAL layer. TALI



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also provides a corresponding SAAL OPCODE that indicates that a SAAL message is being transported. This OPCODE may be used to transport any type of SS7 message, including ISUP messages, SCCP messages, and MTP3 messages that includes SAAL information. In addition, the SAAL OPCODE may be used to transport non-SS7 messages, such as SAAL peer-to-peer messages.

Figure 8 illustrates encapsulation of SAAL messages using a transport adapter layer interface according to an embodiment of the present invention. In Figure 8, SS7 MSU 800 includes layer 2 and layer 3 portions 802 and 803 and opening and closing portions 804 and 805, as previously described. Layer 3 portion 802 includes an SIO value 806, a routing label 807, and other layer 3 information 808. Other layer 3 information 808 can include ISUP information, application part information, or MTP3 information, as previously described. In the illustrated embodiment, all of layer 3 information 803 is encapsulated in service portion 810 of TALI packet 812.

TALI packet 812 includes LENGTH field 814, OPCODE field 816, and SYNC field 818. In addition, TALI packet 812 includes SSCOP trailer 820. LENGTH field 814 specifies the number of octets in service portion 810, OPCODE field 816 is set to a predetermined value for identifying TALI packet 812 as a SAAL packet, and SYNC field 818 is set to a predetermined value for indicating the beginning of TALI packet 812. SSCOP trailer 820 contains a sequence number for sequencing TALI service data packets when a TCP/IP link fails. TALI packet 812 is encapsulated in network frame 522 in the manner described above. SAAL decapsulation can occur in a

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manner similar to that described above with respect to Figure 6 if service portion 810 of TALI packet 812 contains an SS7 MSU. If service portion 810 of TALI packet 812 contains a SAAL peer-to-peer message, decapsulation may be performed by the SAAL layer, rather than the TALI layer.

5

#### TALI State Machine

Table 1 shown below is a state machine for the TALI protocol. In Table, 1, columns represent protocol states and the rows represent events that may or may not cause transitions between protocol states. Blank cells  
10 in the table indicate that no action occurs for a given state in response to a given event. Cells with text indicate functions performed by TALI protocol implementations and state transitions that occur in response to events.

The states in the TALI protocol are: out-of-service (OOS), connecting, near end prohibited – far end prohibited (NEP-FEP), near end  
15 prohibited - far end allowed (NEP-FEA), near end allowed – far end prohibited (NEA-FEP), and near end allowed – far end allowed (NEA-FEA). In the out of service state, a TCP connection has either not been established or has been disabled. In the connecting state, a TCP connection is being established between TCP software associated with TALI endpoints.  
20 "Prohibited" refers to a condition in which a TCP connection is established but TALI service messages are not permitted to be sent to the side for which message flow is prohibited. Finally, "allowed" refers to the willingness of one side of a connection to accept TALI service messages. As used herein, TALI service messages are messages that carry application data. TALI

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messages are messages such as allow, prohibit, monitor, and test, that carry TALI control information. SAAL messages that are not used to carry application data also fall into the TALI messages group. Thus, when in the prohibited state, TALI messages are permitted, while TALI service messages  
5 are not permitted.

The events listed in column 1 of Table 1 include timer expirations, receipt of messages, protocol violations, etc. The TALI protocol includes four main timers: T1, T2, T3, and T4. The T1 timer represents the time interval between the origination of a test message at each TALI  
10 implementation. Each time T1 expires, a TALI implementation should send a test message. The test message will be discussed in more detail below with regard to monitoring the status of a TALI connection.

The timer T2 represents the amount of time that a TALI implementation has to return an allow or a prohibit message in response to a  
15 test message. If the far end of a TALI connection fails to reply with an allow or prohibit message before T2 expires, the sender of the test message treats the T2 message as a protocol violation (PV).

The timer T3 controls the length of time that the near end of the TALI connection should process service data that is received from the far end of a  
20 TALI connection after a management prohibit traffic event has occurred at the near end. As used herein, a "management event" is an action performed by an application that resides above and uses the TALI layer. The timer T3 is used when a transition from NEA-FEA (both ends allowed to send service data) to NEP-FEA (only far end willing to send service data) occurs. When

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an endpoint transitions to the prohibited state, the endpoint is indicating that the endpoint desires to stop receiving service message traffic. That is, if A and B are the endpoints, and endpoint B wishes to not receive service message traffic, then endpoint B sends a prohibit message to endpoint A.

5 After sending the prohibit message, endpoint B receives and processes traffic for T3 seconds. After T3 expires, no service messages are processed by endpoint B. Endpoint A starts diverting traffic to a node other than endpoint B once it receives the prohibit message from endpoint B.

Some data may have been given to the TCP layer at endpoint A for transmission after endpoint B sent the prohibit message but before the prohibit message was received by endpoint A. The application at endpoint A does not have control over messages already given to TCP. If endpoint B did not wait some amount of time, then endpoint B would discard valid messages. Endpoint A would stop passing data to the TCP layer once it has received the prohibit message.

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The T4 timer represents the time interval between the origination of the monitor message. Each time T4 expires, the TAL implementation should send a monitor message. The use of monitor messages to measure the round trip time of a connection will be discussed in more detail below.

20 Other messages illustrated in the events column of Table 1 are special (spcl) messages and extended service (xsrvc) messages. Extended service messages are used to transport types of service traffic other than those described above. Special messages are vendor specific messages used to provide services other than those provided by TAL.

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Another feature of the invention illustrated in Table 1 is the use of monitor messages to identify the TALI software version of the far end of a TALI connection. For example, according to Table 1, when an implementation receives a monitor message in any state except out of service or connecting, the implementation updates the TALI version of the far end of the connection. Exemplary fields in the monitor message used to identify TALI version will be discussed in more detail below.

The following description illustrates an exemplary path through the state machine illustrated in Table 1. First, TCP software associated with a near end TALI implementation may establish a TCP connection with TCP software associated with a far end TALI implementation. During the TCP connection establishment phase, both TALI implementations are in the connecting state. Once a TCP connection is established, both TALI implementations are in the NEP-FEP state, indicating that TALI service messages cannot be sent. When the near end TALI implementation receives an allow message, the state machine switches to the NEP-FEA state. In the NEP-FEA state, the near end TALI implementation will send an allow message when a management allow traffic event occurs. As used herein, the phrase "management allow traffic event" refers to an event that notifies the TALI implementation that service messages can be sent on the socket in question. Once the near end TALI implementation sends an allow message, the state machine transitions to the NEA – FEA state. In the NEA – FEA state, both TALI implementations can send and receive TALI service messages.

Table 1: TALI State Machine

STATE→ EVENT↓	OOS	Connecting	NEP-FEP	NEP-FEA	NEA-FEP	NEA-FEA
T1 Timer Expired			Send test Start T1 Start T2	Send test Start T1 Start T2	Send test Start T1 Start T2	Send test Start T1 Start T2
T2 Timer Expired			PV	PV	PV	PV
T3 Timer Expired			PV	PV		
T4 Timer Expired			Send moni Start T4	Send moni Start T4	Send moni Start T4	Send moni Start T4
Received Test Message			Send proh	Send proh	Send allo	Send allo
Received Allow Message			Stop T2 NEP-FEA	Stop T2	Stop T2 NEA-FEA	Stop T2.
Received Prohibit Message			Stop T2. Send proa	Stop T2 Send proa NEP-FEP	Stop T2 Send proa	Stop T2. Flush or re- route data Send proa NEA-FEP
Received Prohibit Acknowledg ment Message			Stop T3	Stop T3		
Received Monitor Message			Update 'far end version' based on moni content Convert moni to mona send mona	Update 'far end version' based on moni content Convert moni to mona send mona	Update 'far end version' based on moni content Convert moni to mona send mona	Update 'far end version' based on moni content Convert moni to mona send mona
Received Monitor Acknowledg ment Message			Implementation dependent processing.	Implementation dependent processing.	Implementation dependent processing.	Implementation dependent processing.
Received Service Message			PV	If T3 running Process data Else PV	PV	Process data
Received 'mgmt' Message			If 'far end version' < 2.0 PV Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 mgmt capabilities.	If 'far end version' < 2.0 PV Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 mgmt capabilities.	If 'far end version' < 2.0 PV Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 mgmt capabilities.	If 'far end version' < 2.0 PV Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 mgmt capabilities.
Received 'xsrsv' Message			If 'far end version' < 2.0 PV Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 xsrv capabilities.	If 'far end version' < 2.0 PV Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 xsrv capabilities.	If 'far end version' < 2.0 PV Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 xsrsv capabilities.	If 'far end version' < 2.0 PV Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 xsrsv capabilities.

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STATE→ EVENT↓	OOS	Connecting	NEP-FEP	NEP-FEA	NEA-FEP	NEA-FEA
Received 'spcl' Message			If 'far end version' < 2.0 PV Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 spcl capabilities.	If 'far end version' < 2.0 PV Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 spcl capabilities.	If 'far end version' < 2.0 PV Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 spcl capabilities.	If 'far end version' < 2.0 PV Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 spcl capabilities.
Connection Established		start T1 start T2 start T4 if sock_allowed == TRUE Send moni Send allo Send test NEA_FEP Else Send moni Send proh Send test NEP_FEP				
Connection Lost			PV	PV	PV	PV
Protocol Violation			Stop all timers Close the socket Connecting	Stop all timers Close the socket Connecting	Stop all timers Close the socket Connecting	Stop all timers Close the socket Connecting
Manageme nt Open Socket	Open the socket Connec ting					
Manageme nt Close Socket		Close the socket OOS	Stop all timers Close the socket OOS	Stop all timers Close the socket OOS	Stop all timers Close the socket OOS	Stop all timers Close the socket OOS
Manageme nt Prohibit Socket	sock_all owed = FALSE	sock_allowed = FALSE	sock_allowed = FALSE	sock_allowed = FALSE	sock_allowed = FALSE Send proh Start T3 NEP-FEP	sock_allowed = FALSE Send proh Start T3 NEP-FEA
Manageme nt Allow Traffic	sock_all owed = TRUE	sock_allowed = TRUE	sock_allowed = TRUE Send allo. NEA-FEP	sock_allowed = TRUE Send allo. NEA-FEA	sock_allowed = TRUE	sock_allowed = TRUE
User Part Messages	Reject data	Reject data	Reject data	Reject data	Reject data	Send data
Request from higher software layers to send 'mgmt' messages			If 'far end version' < 2.0 Ignore/reject Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 mgmt capabilities.	If 'far end version' < 2.0 Ignore/reject Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 mgmt capabilities.	If 'far end version' < 2.0 Ignore/reject else Process according to the nodes 2.0 mgmt capabilities.	If 'far end version' < 2.0 Ignore/reject Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 mgmt capabilities.

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STATE→ EVENT↓	OOS	Connecting	NEP-FEP	NEP-FEA	NEA-FEP	NEA-FEA
Request from higher software layers to send 'xsr' messages			If 'far end version' < 2.0 Ignore/reject Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 xsrv capabilities.	If 'far end version' < 2.0 Ignore/reject Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 xsrv capabilities.	If 'far end version' < 2.0 Ignore/reject Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 xsrv capabilities.	If 'far end version' < 2.0 Ignore/reject Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 xsrv capabilities.
Request from higher software layers to send 'spcl'			If 'far end version' < 2.0 Ignore/reject Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 spcl capabilities.	If 'far end version' < 2.0 Ignore/reject Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 spcl capabilities.	If 'far end version' < 2.0 Ignore/reject Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 spcl capabilities.	If 'far end version' < 2.0 Ignore/reject Else Process according to the nodes 2.0 spcl capabilities.

### Identifying Individual Message Packets Received over Stream-Oriented

#### Connection

As discussed above, one of the problems associated with receiving

5 data over a stream-oriented connection, such as a TCP connection, is that the packet boundaries created by a sending application may not be preserved by the underlying TCP software. As a result, the receiving application may not receive data in the intended units. The present embodiment solves this problem with regard to TALI packets using the

10 SYNC and LENGTH fields. Figure 9 is a flowchart illustrating exemplary steps that may be performed by TALI process 322 illustrated in Figure 3 for identifying TALI packets received over a stream-oriented connection. In step ST1, a stream-oriented connection such as a TCP connection is established between endpoints. The endpoints may be a signaling gateway and a media

15 gateway controller. In step ST2, TALI process 322 receives data over the connection. In step ST3, TALI process 322 reads a predetermined number



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of bytes to extract the header from the stream of data received over the connection. The predetermined number of bytes is equal to the size of the header as set by the TALI version. For example, the header may be twenty bytes in length.

5           In step ST4, TALI process 322 breaks the header into SYNC, OPCODE, and LENGTH fields. In step ST5, TALI process 322 determines whether the value in the SYNC field is valid. If the value in the SYNC field is not valid, TALI process 322 treats the message as a protocol violation. If TALI process 322 determines that the SYNC field is valid, TALI process 322  
10   may then determine whether the LENGTH and OPCODE fields are valid (step ST7). In step ST8, TALI process 322 reads the next LENGTH bytes in the data stream after the header. In step ST9, TALI process 322 passes the packet up the protocol stack to be processed by the TALI state machine. Once the TALI packet has been passed up the protocol stack, TALI process  
15   322 returns to step ST3 to read the next data header. Because TALI process 322 uses the SYNC and LENGTH fields to determine packet boundaries, SS7 application design is greatly simplified. There is no need for an SS7 application to be concerned with packet boundaries.

20                           TALI Peer-To-Peer Messages

TALI peer-to-peer messages are messages that are transmitted by the TALI layer of one side of a stream-oriented connection and that are terminated by the TALI layer of the other side of a stream-oriented connection. The TALI peer-to-peer messages that are described herein

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include test messages for testing the status of a connection, allow and prohibit messages for allowing and prohibiting communications over a connection without invoking TCP connection establishment or termination procedures, and monitor messages for measuring the round trip time of a  
5 connection. Each of these messages will now be discussed in more detail.

Test messages are used by a TALI implementation to query the remote end of a TALI connection with respect to the willingness of the remote end to carry SS7 service data. Test messages are preferably sent periodically by each TALI implementation based on a predetermined timeout  
10 value. Upon receiving a test message, a TALI implementation must reply with either a prohibit or an allow message to indicate whether the TALI implementation will carry SS7 service data over a TALI connection. If no response is received within the predetermined time period, the connection may be reset and/or reestablished.

15 Table 1 below illustrates the packet structure of a test message. In Table 1, the test message includes a SYNC field, an OPCODE field, and a LENGTH field. The SYNC field is set to TALI, the OPCODE field is set to test, and the LENGTH field is set to 0.

Octets	Field Name	Description
0..3	SYNC	'TALI'
4..7	OPCODE	'test'
8..9	LENGTH	Length = 0

20 Table 1: Test Message

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Figure 10 is a flowchart illustrating exemplary steps that may be performed by a TALI process in monitoring the status of the connection using test messages. In step ST1, TALI process 322 sends a test message to a peer on the other side of a connection. In step ST2, TALI process 322 starts timers T1 and T2. The timer T1 may be used to determine when to send the next test message and the timer T2 may be used to determine the time for receiving a valid response to the test message. In step ST3, timers T1 and T2 are compared to predetermined values. For example, the predetermined value for timer T1 may be set to a time period for sending the next test message. The timer value T2 may be set to a predetermined time period that is preferably less than the keep-alive timer for TCP. For example, the timeout period may be set for two round trip times for the given connection. A method for measuring the round trip time of a connection will be discussed in more detail below.

In step ST4, TALI process 322 determines whether the timer T2 has expired or stopped. The timer T2 expires when it reaches the timeout period set for T2. The timer T2 stops when an allow or a prohibit message is received. If the timer T2 has not expired or stopped, TALI process 322 continues to check the timer. In step ST5, if TALI process 322 determines that the timer T2 has expired, TALI process 322 determines whether a valid response to the test message has been received. As discussed above, a valid response to the test message may be an allow message or a prohibit message. If a valid response has been received, TALI process 322

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determines whether timer T1 has expired or stopped, and, if so, sends another test message to the other side (steps ST6 and ST1). In step ST7, if a valid response has not been received, TALI process 322 may reset and attempt to reestablish the connection. Since the timeout period is preferably less than that of a TCP connection, monitoring of connection status using test messages provides more efficient connection management than TCP. Moreover, because test messages are periodically sent and acted upon, TALI connections can be reliably maintained.

#### 10                                    Allow and Prohibit Messages

As discussed above, the TALI protocol provides allow and prohibit message for allowing and prohibiting communications over a TCP connection without invoking TCP connection and establishment and termination procedures. The allow message is sent in reply to a test query or in response to an internal implementation event to indicate that a TALI implementation is willing to carry SS7 service data over a TALI session. As used herein, a TALI session refers to TALI-level connection between endpoints. A TALI session may be created by establishing a TCP connection followed by the exchange of allow messages, as will be discussed in more detail below. The allow message informs the far end that SS7 traffic can be transmitted on the connection. Allow is one of two possible valid replies to a test message. Before SS7 traffic can be carried over a connection, both ends of the connection are required to send allow messages to each other. Table 2 shown below illustrates an exemplary

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packet structure for an allow message. In Table 2, the allow message includes a SYNC field, an OPCODE field, and a LENGTH field. The SYNC field is set to TALI to indicate that the packet is a TALI packet. The OPCODE field is set to 'allo' to identify an allow message. The LENGTH field is set to 0, since the service portion of the TALI packet does not carry any data.

Octets	Field Name	Description
0..3	SYNC	'TALI'
4..7	OPCODE	'allo'
8..9	LENGTH	Length = 0

Table 2: Allow Message

Like the allow message, the prohibit message is sent in reply to a test query or in response to an internal implementation event. However, unlike the allow message, the purpose of the prohibit message is to indicate that a TALI implementation is not willing to carry SS7 service over the TALI session. The prohibit message informs the far end that SS7 traffic cannot be transmitted over the connection. As long as one end of the connection remains prohibited, SS7 traffic cannot be carried over the connection. Table 3 illustrates an exemplary packet structure for a prohibit message. In Table 3, the prohibit message includes a SYNC field, an OPCODE field, and a LENGTH field. The SYNC field is set to TALI to identify the message as a TALI packet. The OPCODE field is set to 'proh' for prohibit. The LENGTH

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field is set to 0, since the message does not carry any data in the service portion of the message.

Octets	Field Name	Description
0..3	SYNC	'TALI'
4..7	OPCODE	'proh'
8..9	LENGTH	Length = 0

Table 3: Prohibit Message

5           A prohibit acknowledgement message is a message sent by TALI implementation in response to receiving a prohibit message from the far end of a connection. Receipt of a prohibit acknowledgement message indicate that the prohibit message was received correctly and will be acted on accordingly. The side of a connection receiving a prohibit acknowledgement message can thus assume that no more data will be transferred over the connection and that it is okay to perform some desired action associated with the connection. Table 4 shown below illustrates a prohibit acknowledgement message according to an embodiment of the present invention. In Table 4, prohibit acknowledgement message includes a SYNC field, an OPCODE field, and a LENGTH field. The SYNC field may include the value TALI to indicate that the message is a TALI message. The OPCODE field may store the value 'proa' to indicate that the message is a prohibit acknowledgement message. The LENGTH field may include a value of 0, because the service portion of the message does not contain any data.

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Octets	Field Name	Description
0..3	SYNC	'TALI'
4..7	OPCODE	'proa'
8..9	LENGTH	Length = 0

Table 4: Prohibit Acknowledgement Message

Figure 11 is a flowchart illustrating the advantages of using prohibit and acknowledgement messages to enable and disable connections. In step ST1, a TALI session is established between two nodes, node A and node B. Nodes A and B may each be any type of node previously described in which it is desirable to implement a TALI protocol stack. For example, either node may be a signaling gateway, a media gateway controller, or an IP-capable SCP. Establishing a TALI session may include establishing a TCP connection between nodes A and B followed by the exchange of allow messages between nodes A and B. Once the connection is established and communications are allowed, in step ST2, nodes A and B communicate using the TALI session. Such communication may include exchange of SS7 call signaling messages, such as SCCP messages, TCAP messages, ISUP messages, and MTP3 messages. In step ST3, node A sends a prohibit message to node B. The reason for sending the prohibit message may be that node A desires to perform a software upgrade. In step ST4, node A determines whether a prohibit acknowledgement message has been received. If

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a prohibit acknowledge message has not been received, node A may retransmit the prohibit message.

In step ST5, once node A receives the prohibit acknowledge message, node A can assume that data will not be received from node B over the prohibited connection. Accordingly, the manager of node B can perform some desired action, such as a software upgrade. When the desired action is complete, in step ST6, node A can send an allow message to node B over the connection. Once node B receives the allow message, node B can resume communications over the disabled connection. Because a transport adapter layer interface connection can be allowed and prohibited without invoking TCP connection establishment and termination procedures, the time and processing resources required for these operations are reduced over conventional TCP procedures.

#### Performance Measurement and Version Identification

According to another aspect of the invention, messages may be sent between TALI implementation to measure performance of a specific connection and to communicate the TALI version number between communication endpoints. One performance measurement that may be of interest is the round trip time. The round trip time is the time for a message to travel from one side of a connection to the other and back. The vehicle for measuring the round trip time according to the present embodiment includes a monitor message and a monitor acknowledgement message. A monitor message provides a generic echo capability that can be used by a TALI



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implementation in order to measure the round trip time. Table 5 shown below is an example packet structure for the monitor message. In Table 5, the monitor message includes a SYNC field, an OPCODE field, a LENGTH field, a version label field, and a Data field. The SYNC field identifies the monitor message as a TALI message. The OPCODE field includes the value 'moni' to identify the message as a monitor message. The LENGTH field includes the length of the data portion of the monitor message, which contains vendor-dependent data. The version label field in the monitor message may be used to communicate the TALI version number to the far end of a connection. The possible version label field values xxx.yyy specify the major and minor TALI version numbers. For example, a version label field value of 001.000 specifies TALI version 1.0.

Octets	Field Name	Description	Type of Field
0..3	SYNC	'TALI'	4 byte Ascii text
4..7	OPCODE	'moni'	4 byte Ascii text
8..9	LENGTH	Length (include the version label and data fields)	Integer
10.. 21	VER. LABEL	'vers xxx.yyy'	12 byte Ascii text
22..X	Data	Vendor Dependent Maximum length of this message (as coded in bytes 8-9, and stored in bytes 10-x) should not exceed 200 bytes	Variable

Table 5: Version Control 'moni' Message

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In response to receiving a monitor message, a TALI session preferably sends a monitor acknowledgement message. Table 6 shown below illustrates an example packet structure for a monitor acknowledgement message. In the illustrated example, the monitor acknowledgement message includes a SYNC field, an OPCODE field, a LENGTH field, and a Data field. The SYNC field stores the value TALI to indicate the start of a TALI packet. The OPCODE field stores the value 'mona' to identify the packet as a monitor acknowledgement message. The LENGTH field stores the length of the data portion of the monitor acknowledgement message. The data portion of the monitor acknowledgement message preferably includes the same data that was sent in the monitor message. The matching of data allows the monitor message to be paired with the monitor acknowledgement message.

Octets	Field Name	Description
0..3	SYNC	'TALI'
4..7	OPCODE	'mona'
8..9	LENGTH	Length
10..X	Data	Vendor Dependent

Table 6: Monitor Acknowledgement Message

Figure 12 is a flowchart illustrating the use of the monitor message and the monitor acknowledgement message to measure the round trip time of a connection and to communicate the TALI version number to the far end

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of a connection. In step ST1, a TALI implementation reads a timer value associated with the local machine and includes the timer value in a monitor message. In step ST2, the TALI implementation places its TALI version number in the monitor message. The version number is used by the other side of a TALI connection to keep track of the version number. For example, upon receiving a monitor message, an endpoint may determine whether the monitor message has a valid version label value in the version label field. This may include comparing bytes located where the version label field should be in the monitor message to a predetermined list of version values.

10 If the value matches one of the values in the list, then the endpoint stores that value as the TALI version for the other side. If the match is not found, the endpoint may store a default version for the other side, e.g., 1.0. Since both sides of a connection preferably send monitor messages to each other and the monitor messages can include the sending sides TALI version

15 number, each side of the connection can determine the current version of the other side.

In step ST3, the TALI implementation sends the monitor message to the other side of a connection. As discussed above, the other side of the connection may use the version label to update the TALI version of the

20 sending side. The other side of the connection changes the OPCODE of the message from monitor to monitor acknowledgment and sends the message back to the sending TALI implementation. In step ST4, the TALI implementation receives the monitor acknowledgement message from the other side of the connection and extracts a timer value from the monitor

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acknowledgement message. In step ST5, the TALI implementation reads the local timer value when the monitor acknowledgement message was received. In step ST6, the TALI implementation computes the round trip time for the connection based on the difference between the local timer value when the monitor message was received and timer value read from the monitor acknowledgement message. Computing the round trip time in this manner allows optimization of other timers, such as retransmission timers.

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#### Authentication of Critical Messages

As indicated above, many of the messages sent between TALI implementations can allow and/or prohibit communications over a connection. Since such messages could be disastrous in a telecommunications environment, it is preferable that security messages be implemented to ensure that only authorized users can send these messages. One method for providing this security is to authenticate critical messages. Examples of critical messages described herein are prohibit messages and test messages. To ensure that these messages are transmitted by authorized users, encryption and/or authentication procedures can be used. In one example, a public key encryption algorithm, such as Rivest, Shamir, Adleman (RSA), can be used to verify that the message originated from an authorized user. In order to authenticate a message using a public key encryption algorithm, the sending node sends its public key to the receiving node. The sending node then signs the message using

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its private key. The receiving node then authenticates the message using the sending node's public key. If the message authenticates correctly, i.e., if a valid TALI message is received, then the receiving node knows that the message came from an authorized user. In this manner, the security of TALI

5 connections can be increased.

According to another aspect of the invention, critical messages may be authenticated in a different manner using a public key cryptosystem. For example, a sender and a receiver may exchange public keys. That is, the sender S may send S's public key to the receiver R, and R may send R's

10 public key to S. S may then encrypt a critical message, such as a prohibit message using R's public key. When R receives the message, R may decrypt the message using R's private key. If the message decrypts correctly, R knows that the message comes from someone who has access to R's public key. R may then encrypt a response message, such as a

15 prohibit acknowledgement message, using S's public key. R may then send the message to S. S may decrypt the message using S's private key. If the message decrypts correctly, S knows that the message originated from someone with access to S's public key. In this manner, two-way authentication may be achieved.

20 It will be understood that various details of the invention may be changed without departing from the scope of the invention. Furthermore, the foregoing description is for the purpose of illustration only, and not for the purpose of limitation—the invention being defined by the claims.

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CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method for encapsulating a signaling connection control part (SCCP) message in an Internet protocol (IP) datagram using a transport  
5 adapter layer interface (TALI), the method comprising:
  - (a) receiving an SS7 message signal unit (MSU), the SS7 MSU including message transfer part (MTP) layers 1, 2, and 3 and an SCCP layer;
  - (b) discarding MTP layer 1 and 2 information from the SS7 MSU;
  - 10 (c) placing the SCCP layer in a service portion of a TALI packet;
  - (d) adding a TALI header to the TALI packet; and
  - (e) adding transmission control protocol (TCP) and IP headers to the TALI packet.
- 15 2. The method of claim 1 comprising placing MTP layer 3 information without modification into the service portion of the TALI packet.
3. The method of claim 1 comprising extracting MTP layer 3 information from the SS7 MSU and placing the MTP layer 3 information in the  
20 SCCP layer.
4. The method of claim 3 wherein extracting MTP layer 3 information includes extracting an originating point code (OPC) value from the SS7 MSU and placing the MTP layer 3 information in the SCCP layer

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includes placing the OPC value in a calling party address field in the SCCP layer.

- 5     5. The method of claim 3 wherein extracting MTP layer 3 information includes extracting a destination point code (DPC) value from the SS7 MSU and placing the MTP layer 3 information in the SCCP layer includes placing the DPC value in a called party address field in the SCCP layer.
- 10   6. The method of claim 1 comprising setting a SYNC field in the TALI packet to a predetermined value indicating the beginning of the TALI packet for stream-oriented communications.
- 15   7. The method of claim 1 comprising setting a LENGTH field in the TALI packet to a value indicative of the LENGTH of the service portion of the TALI packet.
- 20   8. The method of claim 1 comprising setting an OPCODE field in the TALI packet to a predetermined value for identifying the TALI packet as an SCCP packet.
9. A method for encapsulating a message transfer part layer 3 (MTP3) packet in an Internet protocol (IP) datagram using a transport adapter layer interface (TALI), the method comprising:

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- (a) receiving an MTP3 message signal unit (MSU), the MTP3 MSU including MTP layers 1, 2, and 3;
  - (b) discarding MTP layers 1 and 2 from the MTP3 MSU;
  - (c) placing MTP layer 3 information from the MTP3 MSU in a service  
5 portion of a TALI packet;
  - (d) adding a TALI header to the TALI packet; and
  - (e) adding transmission control protocol (TCP) and IP headers to the TALI packet.
- 10 10. The method of claim 9 wherein placing the MTP layer 3 information in the service portion includes placing a routing label and a service indicator octet (SIO) in the service portion of the TALI packet.
11. The method of claim 10 wherein placing the MTP layer 3 information in  
15 the service portion includes placing layer 3 information in addition to the routing label and the SIO in the service portion of the TALI packet.
12. The method of claim 11 wherein placing information in addition to the routing label and the SIO includes placing network management  
20 information in the service portion of the TALI packet.
13. The method of claim 12 wherein placing network management information in the service portion of the TALI packet includes placing changeover information in the service portion of the TALI packet.



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14. The method of claim 12 wherein placing network management information in the service portion of the TALI packet includes placing changeback information in the service portion of the TALI packet.
- 5 15. The method of claim 12 wherein placing network management information in the service portion of the TALI packet includes placing flow control information in the service portion of the TALI packet.
- 10 16. The method of claim 11 wherein placing information in addition to the routing label and the SIO includes placing network testing information in the service portion of the TALI packet.
- 15 17. The method of claim 16 wherein placing network testing information in the service portion of a TALI packet includes placing signaling-route-set-test information in the service portion of the TALI packet.
18. The method of claim 9 comprising setting a SYNC field in the TALI packet to a predetermined value indicating the beginning of the TALI packet for stream-oriented communications.
- 20 19. The method of claim 9 comprising setting a LENGTH field in the TALI packet to a value indicative of the LENGTH of the service portion of the TALI packet.

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20. The method of claim 9 comprising setting the OPCODE field to a predetermined value for identifying the TALI packet as an MTP3 packet.
- 5 21. The method of claim 9 comprising adding an application layer sequence number to the TALI packet.
22. The method of claim 21 comprising adding an application layer sequence number includes adding a service specific connection  
10 oriented protocol (SSCOP) trailer to the TALI packet.
23. A method for monitoring the status of a transmission control protocol (TCP) connection used to communicate SS7 messages between SS7 and Internet protocol (IP) nodes, the method comprising:
- 15 (a) establishing a first transmission control protocol (TCP) connection for communicating SS7 messages between a first signaling node and a second signaling node;
- (b) transmitting a first message encapsulated in a TCP segment over the first TCP connection;
- 20 (c) listening for a reply to the first message over the first TCP connection; and
- (d) in response to failing to receive the reply within a predetermined time period, treating the first TCP connection as being disabled.

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24. The method of claim 23 comprising in response to failing to receive the reply within the predetermined time period, attempting the re-establish communications over the first TCP connection.
- 5 25. The method of claim 23 wherein the predetermined time period is less than a TCP disconnection timeout value.
26. The method of claim 23 wherein transmitting a first message includes transmitting a TALI test message and listening for a reply includes  
10 listening for a TALI allow or prohibit message.
27. The method of claim 23 comprising, in response to receiving the reply, determining a round trip time (RTT) between the first and second signaling nodes.  
15
28. The method of claim 27 wherein determining a round trip time includes:
- (a) reading a local timer value and inserting the local timer value in the first message;
  - (b) reading the local timer value when the reply is received;
  - 20 (c) reading a timer value from the reply; and
  - (d) computing the RTT based on the difference between the timer value in the reply and the local timer value when the reply was received.

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29. The method of claim 23 comprising inserting a local transport adapter layer interface version number in the first message.
30. A method for suspending and resuming SS7 message communications over a transmission control protocol (TCP) connection, the method comprising:
- (a) establishing a first TCP connection between a first signaling node and a second signaling node;
  - (b) sending and receiving TCP/IP-encapsulated SS7 messages over the first TCP connection; and
  - (c) receiving a first control message over the first TCP connection and, in response, stopping the sending of SS7 messages over the first TCP connection.
31. The method of claim 30 comprising, after receiving the first control message, resuming the sending of SS7 messages over the first TCP connection in response to receiving a second control message over the first TCP connection.
32. The method of claim 30 comprising, in response to receiving the first control message, switching SS7 communications between the first and second signaling nodes to a second TCP connection established between the first and second signaling nodes.

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33. The method of claim 30 wherein receiving a first control message includes receiving the first control message signed using a predetermined encryption algorithm and verifying that the first control message originating from an authorized node using the first encryption  
5 algorithm.
34. The method of claim 30 wherein establishing a TCP connection between first and second signaling nodes includes establishing the first TCP connection between a signaling gateway and a media gateway  
10 controller.
35. The method of claim 30 wherein establishing a connection between first and second signaling nodes includes establishing a connection between a first SS7 signaling node and an IP node.  
15
36. The method of claim 30 wherein establishing a connection between first and second signaling nodes includes establishing a connection between a first IP-capable SS7 signaling node and a second IP-capable SS7 node.  
20
37. A method for processing transport adapter layer interface (TALI) messages received over a stream-oriented connection, the method comprising:

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- (a) receiving a plurality of TALI messages over a stream-oriented connection;
  - (b) identifying the beginning of each of the TALI messages using a first field in each of the TALI messages;
  - 5 (c) identifying the end of each of the TALI messages using a second field in each of the TALI messages; and
  - (d) extracting individual TALI message packets using the first and second fields.
- 10 38. The method of claim 37 comprising identifying the content of each of the TALI messages using a third field in each of the TALI messages.
39. The method of claim 37 wherein receiving a plurality of TALI messages over a stream-oriented connection includes receiving a plurality of TALI
- 15 messages over a transmission control protocol (TCP) connection.
40. The method of claim 37 wherein identifying the beginning of each of the TALI messages includes identifying each of the TALI messages using a SYNC field in each of the TALI messages.
- 20 41. The method of claim 37 wherein identifying the end of each of the TALI messages using a second data field includes identifying the end of each of the TALI messages using a LENGTH field for specifying the length of a data portion of each of the TALI messages.

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42. The method of claim 38 wherein identifying the content of each of the TALI messages using a third data field includes identifying the content of each of the TALI messages using an OPCODE field for specifying the content of each of the TALI messages.

5

43. The method of claim 37 wherein a data portion of each of the TALI messages carries SS7 information.

44. A computer program product comprising computer-executable instructions embodied in a computer-readable medium for performing steps comprising:

- 10 (a) receiving an SS7 message signal unit (MSU), the SS7 MSU including message transfer part (MTP) layers 1, 2, and 3 and an SCCP layer;
- 15 (b) discarding MTP layer 1 and 2 information from the SS7 MSU;
- (c) placing the SCCP layer in a service portion of a TALI packet;
- (d) adding a TALI header to the TALI packet; and
- (e) adding transmission control protocol (TCP) and IP headers to the TALI packet.

20

45. The computer program product of claim 44 comprising placing MTP layer 3 information without modification into the service portion of the TALI packet.

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46. The computer program product of claim 44 comprising extracting MTP layer 3 information from the SS7 MSU and placing the MTP layer 3 information in the SCCP layer.
47. The computer program product of claim 46 wherein extracting MTP layer 3 information includes extracting an originating point code (OPC) value from the SS7 MSU and placing the MTP layer 3 information in the SCCP layer includes placing the OPC value in a calling party address field in the SCCP layer.
48. The computer program product of claim 46 wherein extracting MTP layer 3 information includes extracting a destination point code (DPC) value from the SS7 MSU and placing the MTP layer 3 information in the SCCP layer includes placing the DPC value in a called party field address in the SCCP layer.
49. The computer program product of claim 44 comprising setting a SYNC field in the TALI packet to a predetermined value indicating the beginning of the TALI packet for stream-oriented communications.
50. The computer program product of claim 44 comprising setting a LENGTH field in the TALI packet to a value indicative of the LENGTH of the service portion of the TALI packet.



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51. The computer program product of claim 44 comprising setting an  
OPCODE field in the TALI packet to a predetermined value for  
identifying the TALI packet as an SCCP packet.
- 5 52. A computer program product for comprising computer-executable  
instructions embodied in a computer-readable medium for performing  
steps comprising:
- (a) receiving an MTP3 message signal unit (MSU), the SS7 MSU  
including MTP layers 1, 2, and 3;
  - 10 (b) discarding MTP layers 1 and 2 from the MTP3 MSU;
  - (c) placing MTP layer 3 information from the MTP3 MSU in a service  
portion of a TALI packet;
  - (d) adding a TALI header to the TALI packet; and
  - (e) adding transmission control protocol (TCP) and IP headers to the  
15 TALI packet.
53. The computer program product of claim 52 wherein placing the MTP  
layer 3 information in the service portion includes placing a routing  
label and a service indicator octet (SIO) in the service portion of the  
20 TALI packet.
54. The computer program product of claim 53 wherein placing the MTP  
layer 3 information in the service portion includes placing layer 3

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information in addition to the routing label and the SIO in the service portion of the TALI packet.

55. The computer program product of claim 53 wherein placing information  
5 in addition to the routing label and the SIO, includes placing network management information in the service portion of the TALI packet.
56. The computer program product of claim 55 wherein placing network management information in the service portion of the TALI packet includes placing changeover information in the service portion of the  
10 TALI packet.
57. The computer program product of claim 55 wherein placing network management information in the service portion of the TALI packet includes placing changeback information in the service portion of the  
15 TALI packet.
58. The computer program product of claim 55 wherein placing network management information in the service portion of the TALI packet includes placing flow control information in the service portion of the  
20 TALI packet.
59. The computer program product of claim 54 wherein placing information in addition to the routing label and the SIO includes placing network testing information in the service portion of the TALI packet.

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60. The computer program product of claim 59 wherein placing network testing information in the service portion of a TALI packet includes placing signaling-route-set-test information in the service portion of the TALI packet.
- 5
61. The computer program product of claim 52 comprising setting a SYNC field in the TALI packet to a predetermined value indicating the beginning of the TALI packet for stream-oriented communications.
- 10
62. The computer program product of claim 52 comprising setting a LENGTH field in the TALI packet to a value indicative of the LENGTH of the service portion of the TALI packet.
- 15
63. The computer program product of claim 52 comprising setting the OPCODE field to a predetermined value for identifying the TALI packet as an MTP3 packet.
- 20
64. The computer program product of claim 52 comprising adding an application layer sequence number to the TALI packet.
65. The computer program product of claim 64 comprising adding an application layer sequence number includes adding a service specific connection oriented protocol (SSCOP) trailer to the TALI packet.

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66. A computer program product comprising computer-executable instructions embodied in a computer-readable medium for performing steps comprising:
- 5 (a) establishing a first transmission control protocol (TCP) connection for communicating SS7 messages between a first signaling node and a second signaling node;
- (b) transmitting a first message encapsulated in a TCP segment over the first TCP connection;
- 10 (c) listening for a reply to the first message over the first TCP connection; and
- (d) in response to failing to receive the reply within a predetermined time period, treating the first TCP connection as being disabled.
67. The computer program product of claim 66 comprising in response to failing to receive the reply within the predetermined time period, attempting the re-establish communications over the first TCP connection.
- 15 68. The computer program product of claim 66 wherein the predetermined time period is less than a TCP disconnection timeout value.
- 20 69. The computer program product of claim 66 wherein transmitting a first message includes transmitting a TALI test message and listening for a reply includes listening for a TALI allow or prohibit message.

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70. The computer program product of claim 66 comprising, in response to receiving the reply, determining a round trip time (RTT) between the first and second signaling nodes.
- 5 71. The computer program product of claim 70 wherein determining a round trip time includes:
- (a) reading a local timer value and inserting the local timer value in the first message;
  - (b) reading the local timer value when the reply is received;
  - 10 (c) reading a timer value from the reply; and
  - (d) computing the RTT based on the difference between the timer value in the reply and the local timer value when the reply was received.
- 15 72. The computer program product of claim 71 inserting a local transport adapter layer interface version number in the first message.
73. A computer program product comprising computer-executable instructions embodied in a computer-readable medium for performing
- 20 steps comprising:
- (a) establishing a first TCP connection between a first signaling node and a second signaling node;
  - (b) sending and receiving TCP/IP-encapsulated SS7 messages over the first TCP connection; and

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(c) receiving a first control message over the first TCP connection and, in response, stopping the sending of SS7 messages over the first TCP connection.

5    74. The computer program product of claim 73 comprising, after receiving the first control message, resuming the sending of SS7 messages over the first TCP connection in response to receiving a second control message over the first TCP connection.

10   75. The computer program product of claim 73 comprising, in response to receiving the first control message, switching SS7 communications between the first and second signaling nodes to a second TCP connection established between the first and second signaling nodes.

15   76. The computer program product of claim 73 wherein receiving a first control message includes receiving the first control message signed using a predetermined encryption algorithm and verifying that the first control message originated from an authorized node using the first encryption algorithm.

20

77. The computer program product of claim 73 wherein establishing a TCP connection between first and second signaling nodes includes establishing the first TCP connection between a signaling gateway and a media gateway controller.

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78. The computer program product of claim 73 wherein establishing a connection between first and second signaling nodes includes establishing a connection between a first SS7 signaling node and an IP node.

5

79. The computer program product of claim 73 wherein establishing a connection between first and second signaling nodes includes establishing a connection between a first IP-capable SS7 signaling node and a second IP-capable SS7 node.

10

80. A computer program comprising computer-executable instructions embodied in a computer-readable medium for performing steps comprising:

15

(a) receiving a plurality of TALI messages over a stream-oriented connection;

(b) identifying the beginning of each of the TALI messages using a first field in each of the TALI messages;

(c) identifying the end of each of the TALI messages using a second field in each of the TALI messages; and

20

(d) extracting individual TALI message packets using the first and second fields.

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81. The computer program product of claim 80 comprising identifying the content of each of the TALI messages using a third field in each of the TALI messages.
- 5 82. The computer program product of claim 80 wherein receiving a plurality of TALI messages over a stream-oriented connection includes receiving a plurality of TALI messages over a transmission control protocol (TCP) connection.
- 10 83. The computer program product of claim 80 wherein identifying the beginning of each of the TALI messages includes identifying each of the TALI messages using a SYNC field in each of the SS7 messages.
- 15 84. The computer program product of claim 80 wherein identifying the end of each of the TALI messages using a second data field includes identifying the end of each of the TALI messages using a LENGTH field for specifying the length of a data portion of each of the TALI messages.
- 20 85. The computer program product of claim 81 wherein identifying the content of each of the TALI messages using a third data field includes identifying the content of each of the TALI messages using an OPCODE field for specifying the content of each of the TALI messages.

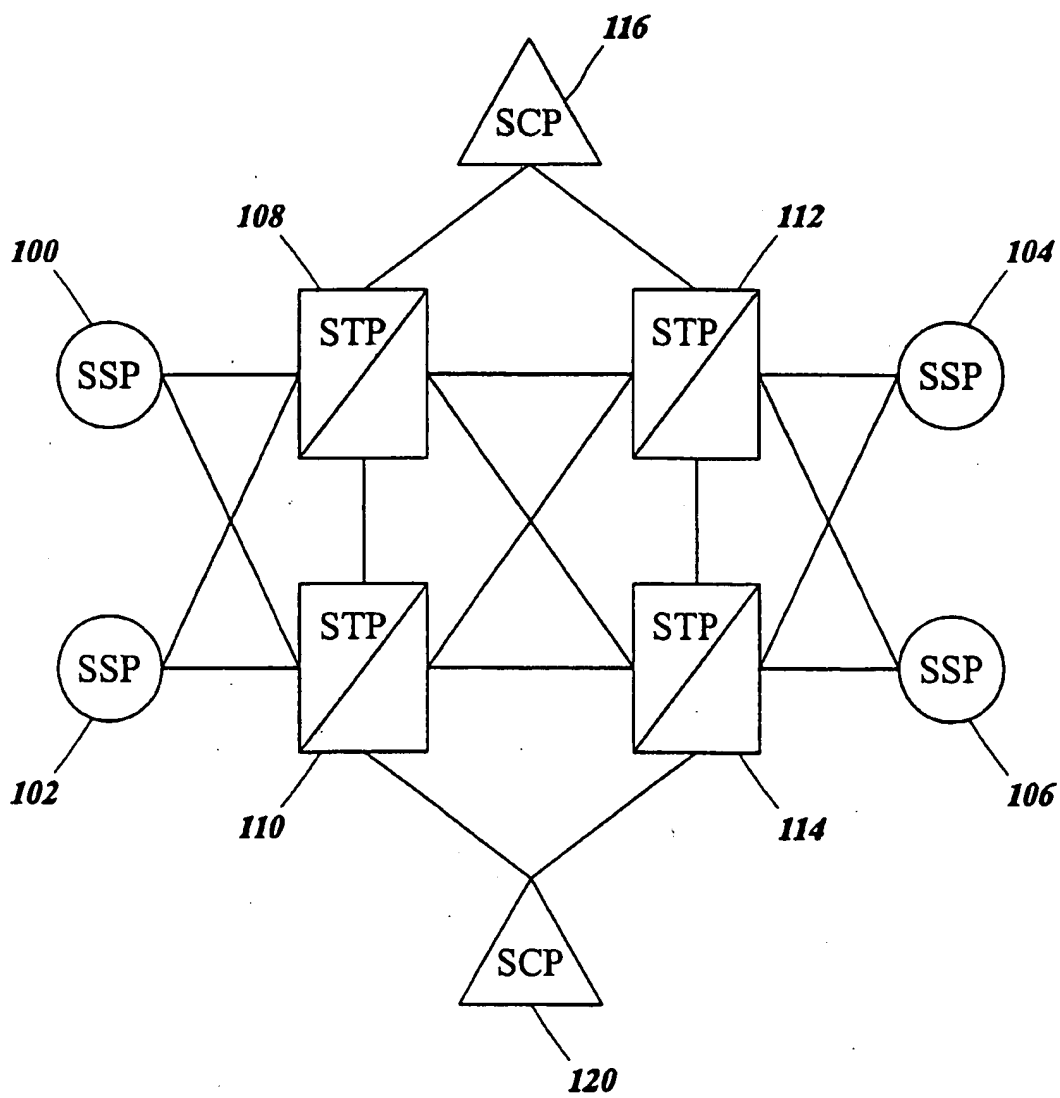


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86. The computer program product of claim 80 wherein a data portion of each of the TALI messages carries SS7 information.
87. A communications network element for implementing a transport adapter layer interface (TALI) protocol stack, the communications  
5 network element comprising:
- (a) a TALI process for receiving SS7 messages, discarding SS7 layer 1 and 2 information from the SS7 messages, and for adding a TALI header to each of the SS7 messages to form TALI messages; and
  - 10 (b) a transmission control protocol/Internet protocol (TCP/IP) process for receiving the TALI messages from the TALI process, adding TCP and IP headers to the TALI messages, and forwarding the TALI messages to a receiving application over an IP network based on the TCP and IP headers.
- 15
88. The communications network element of claim 87 comprising a data communications module (DCM) including hardware for sending and receiving messages over the IP network, wherein the TALI process is implemented on the DCM.
- 20
89. The communications network element of claim 88 wherein the TCP/IP process is implemented on the DCM.

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90. The communications network element of claim 87 wherein the TCP/IP process is adapted to receive a stream of TCP data from the IP network.
- 5 91. The communications network element of claim 90 wherein the TALI process is adapted to receive the stream of TCP data from the TCP/IP process and to identify individual TALI message boundaries in the stream.

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**FIG. 1**  
**(PRIOR ART)**

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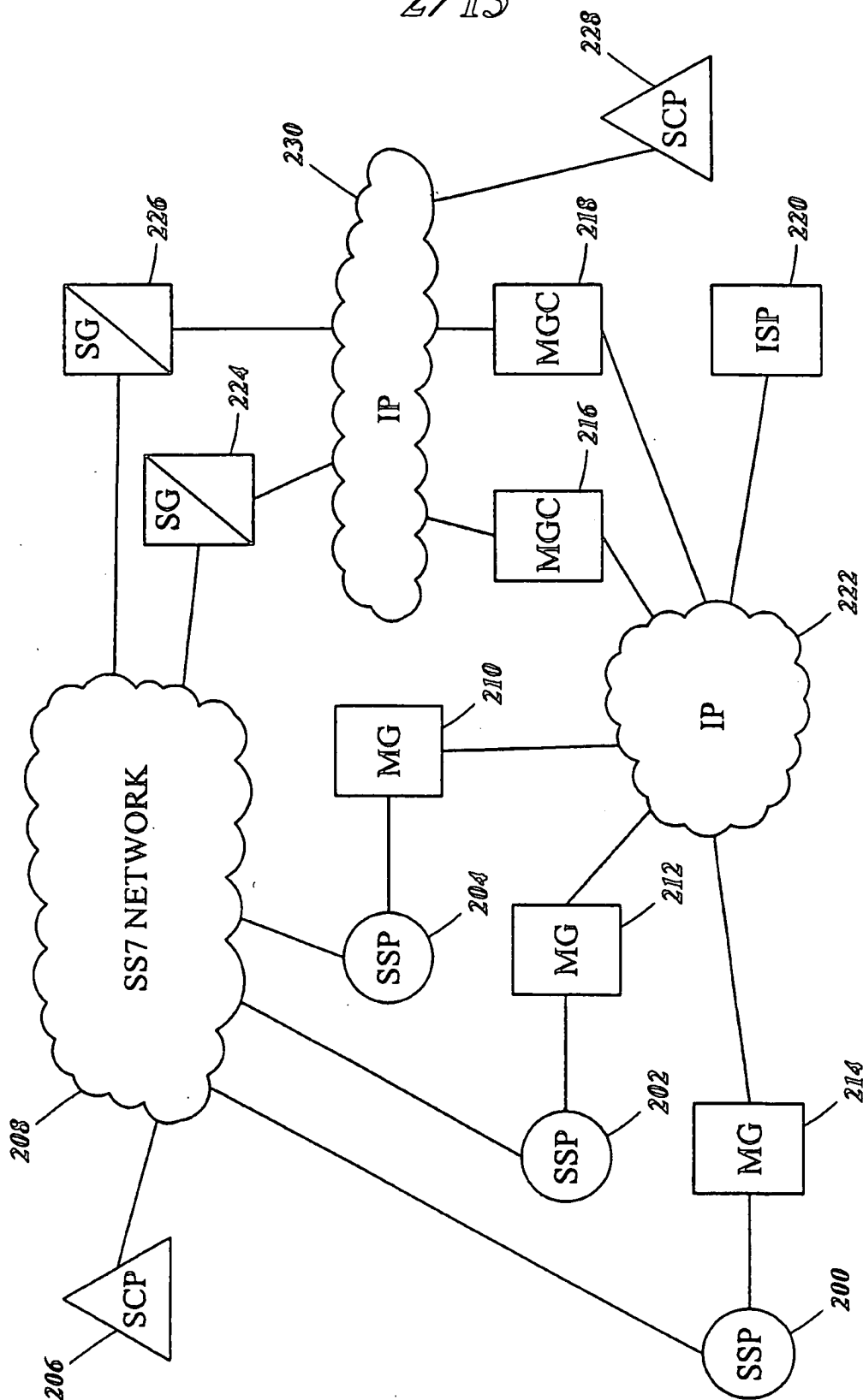
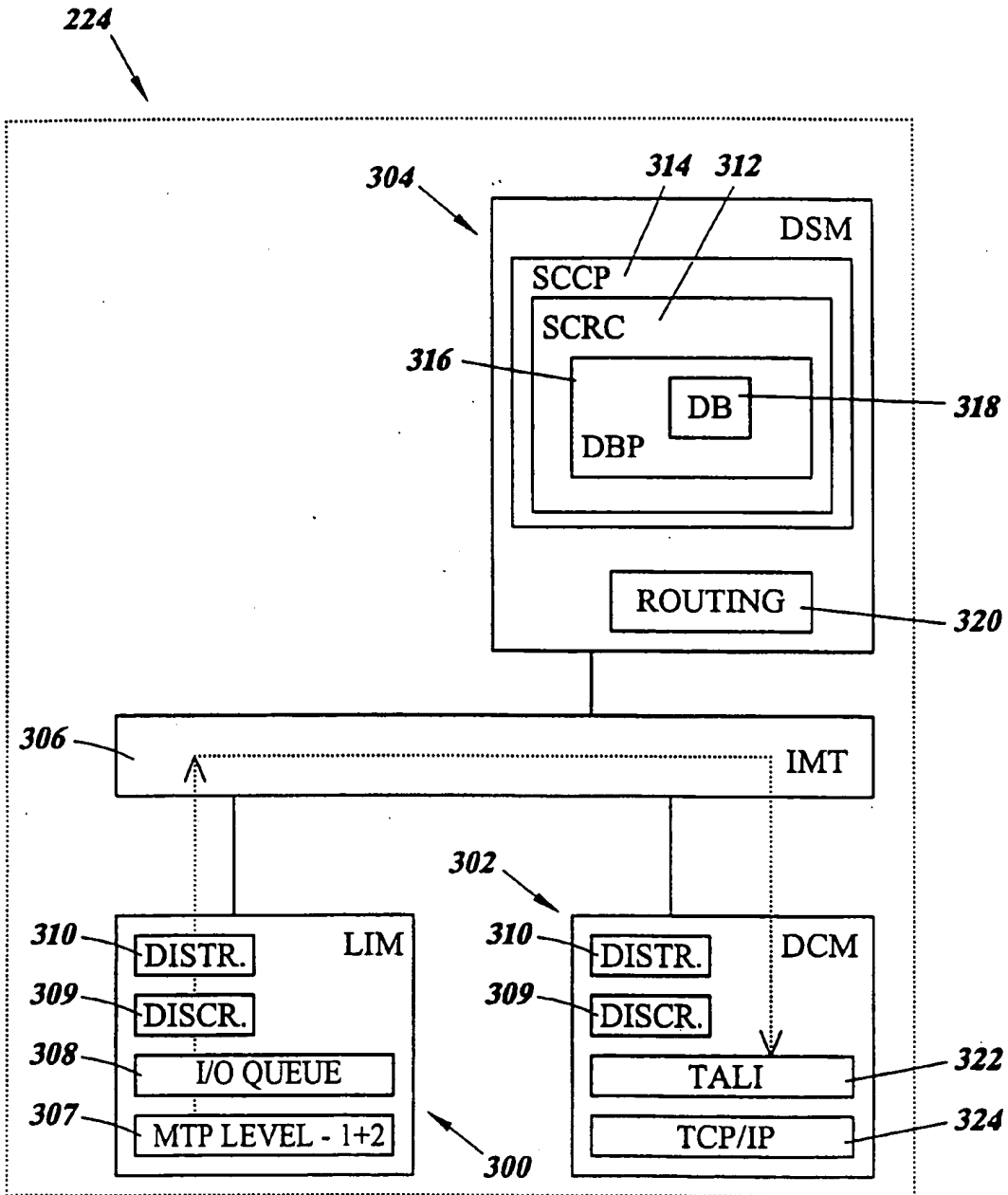


FIG. 2

**3/13****FIG. 3**

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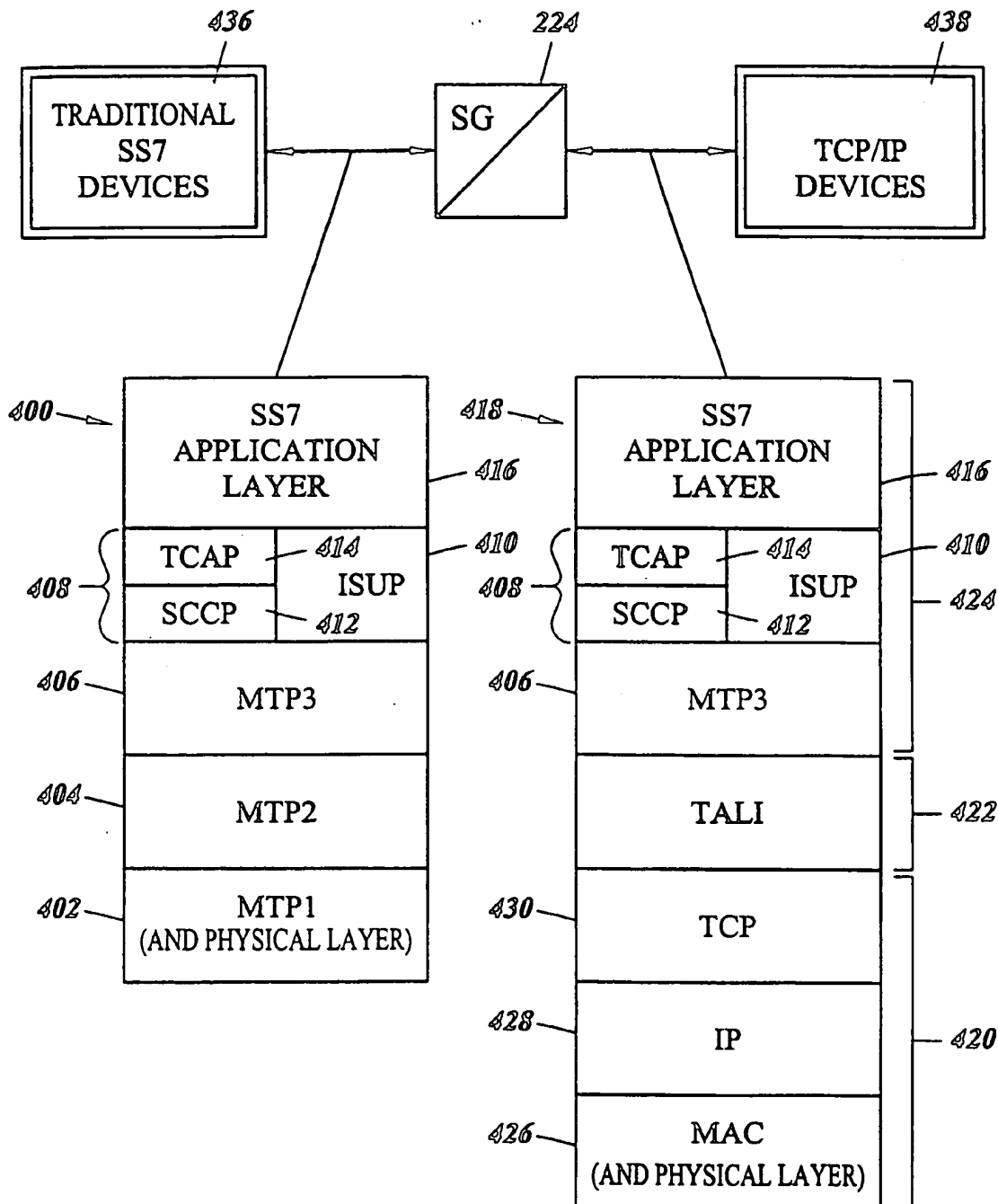


FIG. 4(a)

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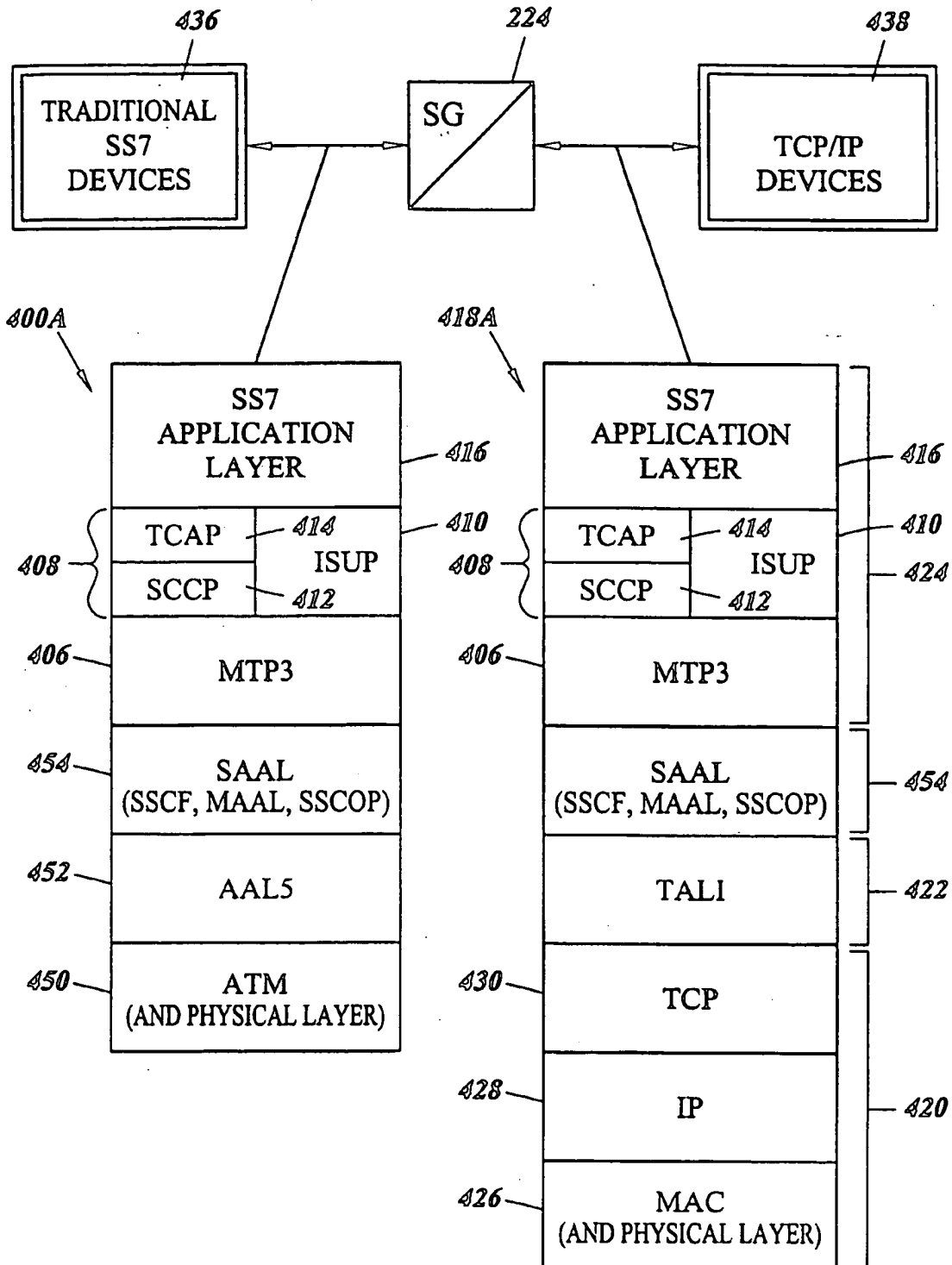


FIG. 4(b)

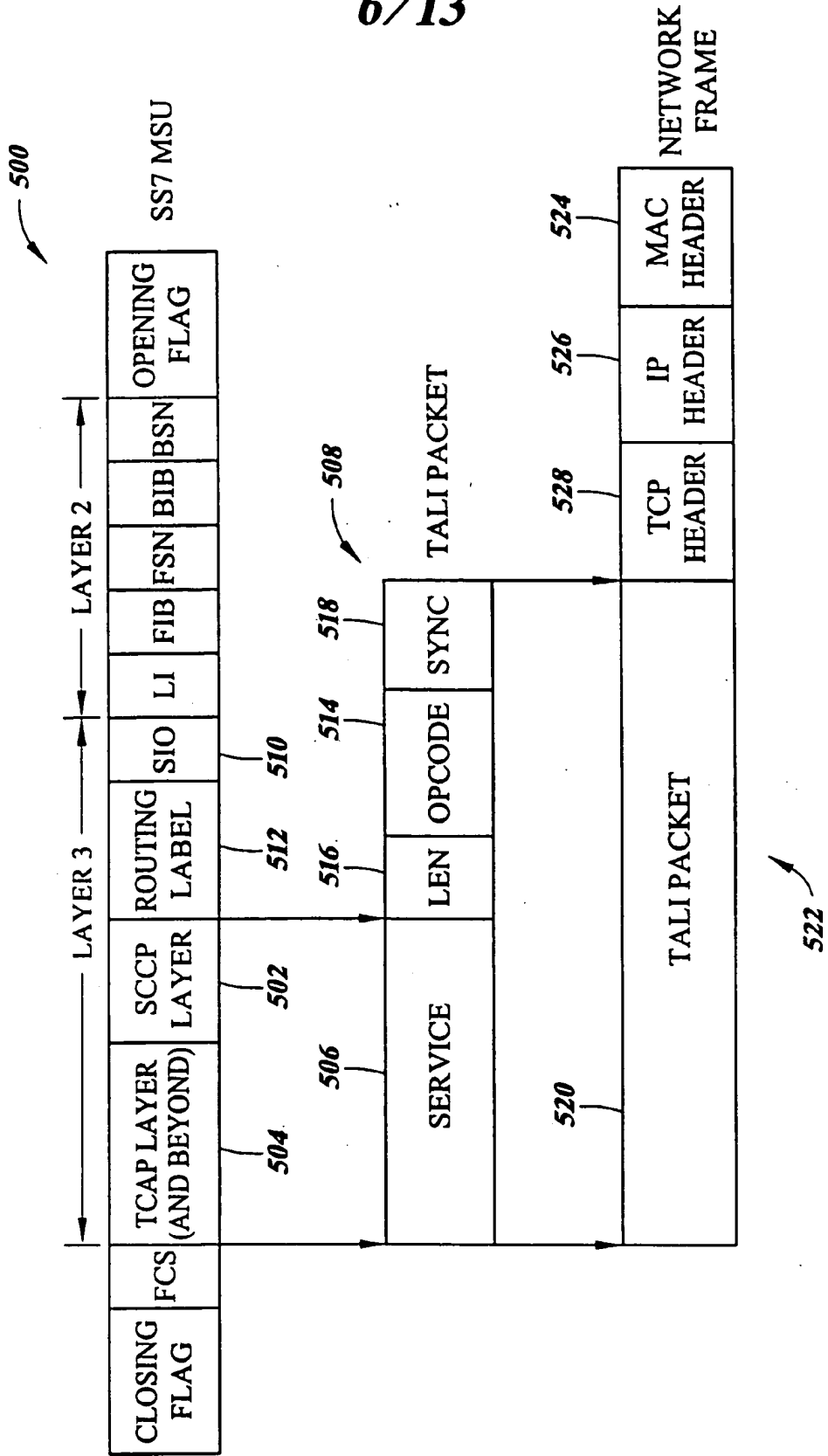
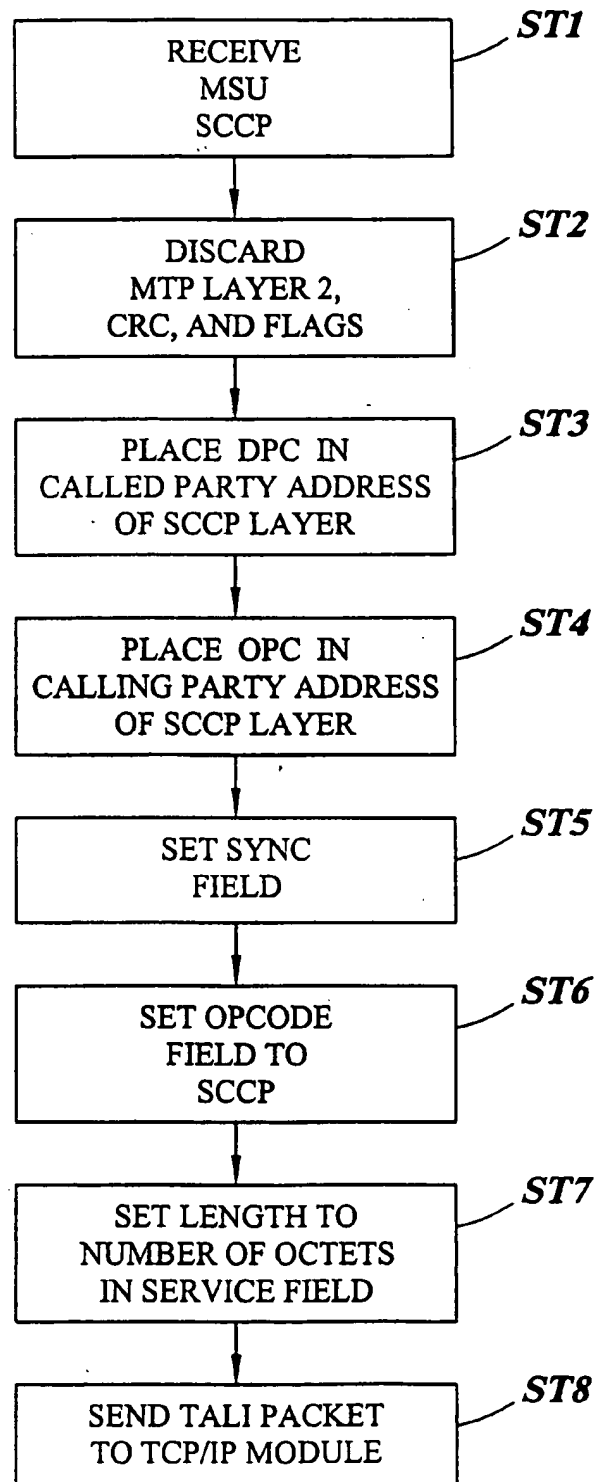
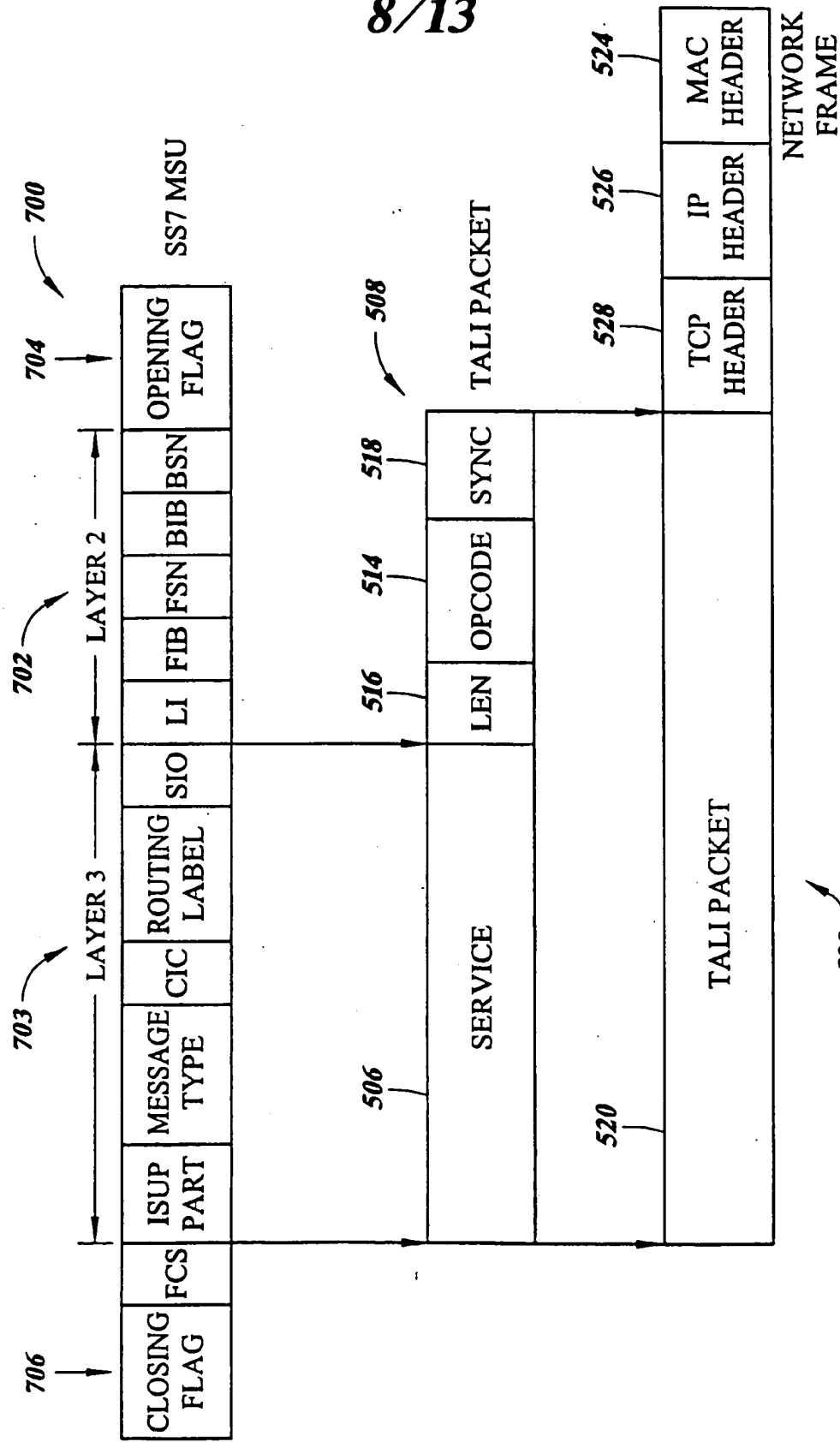


FIG. 5



**7/13****FIG. 6**

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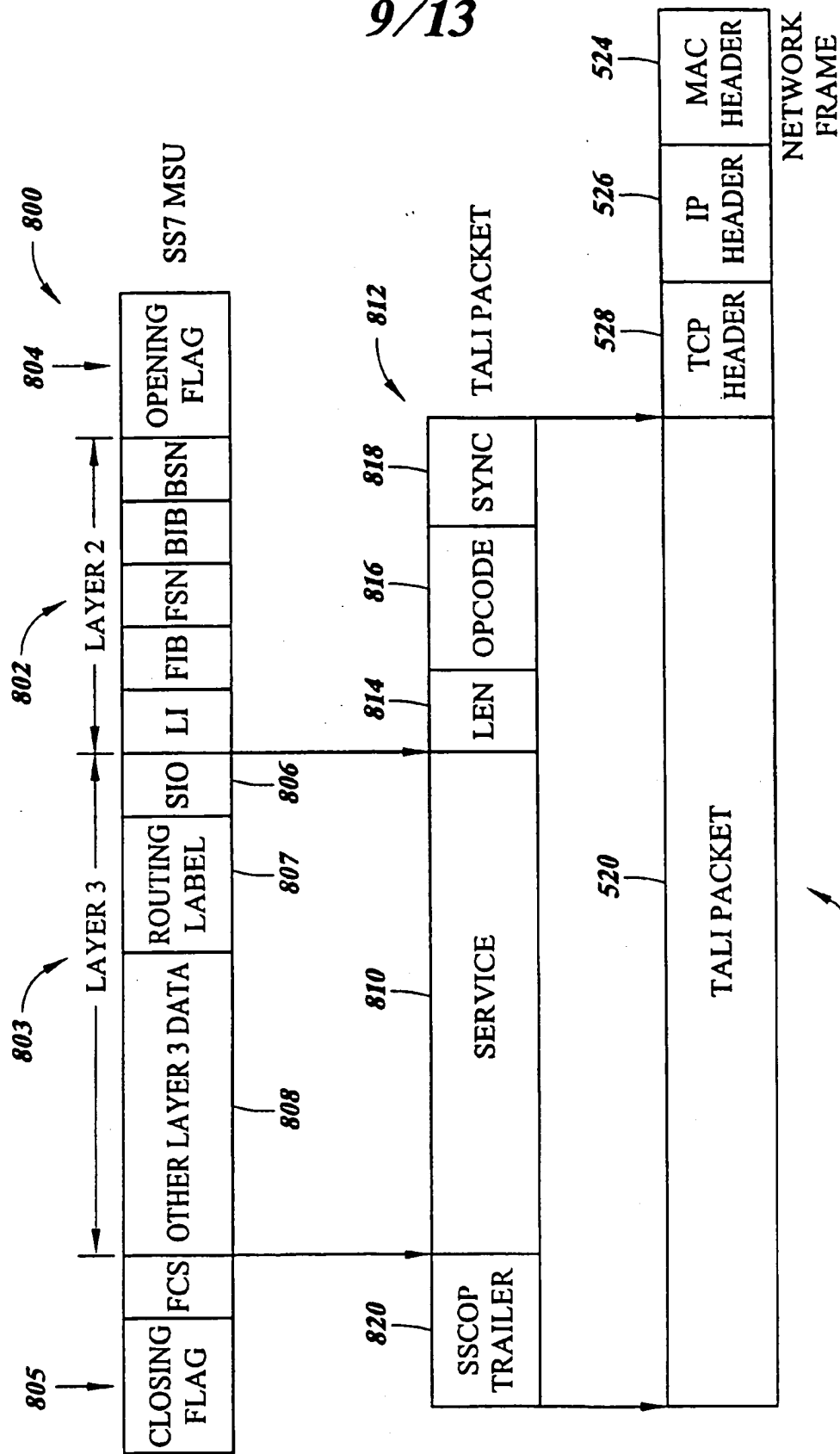
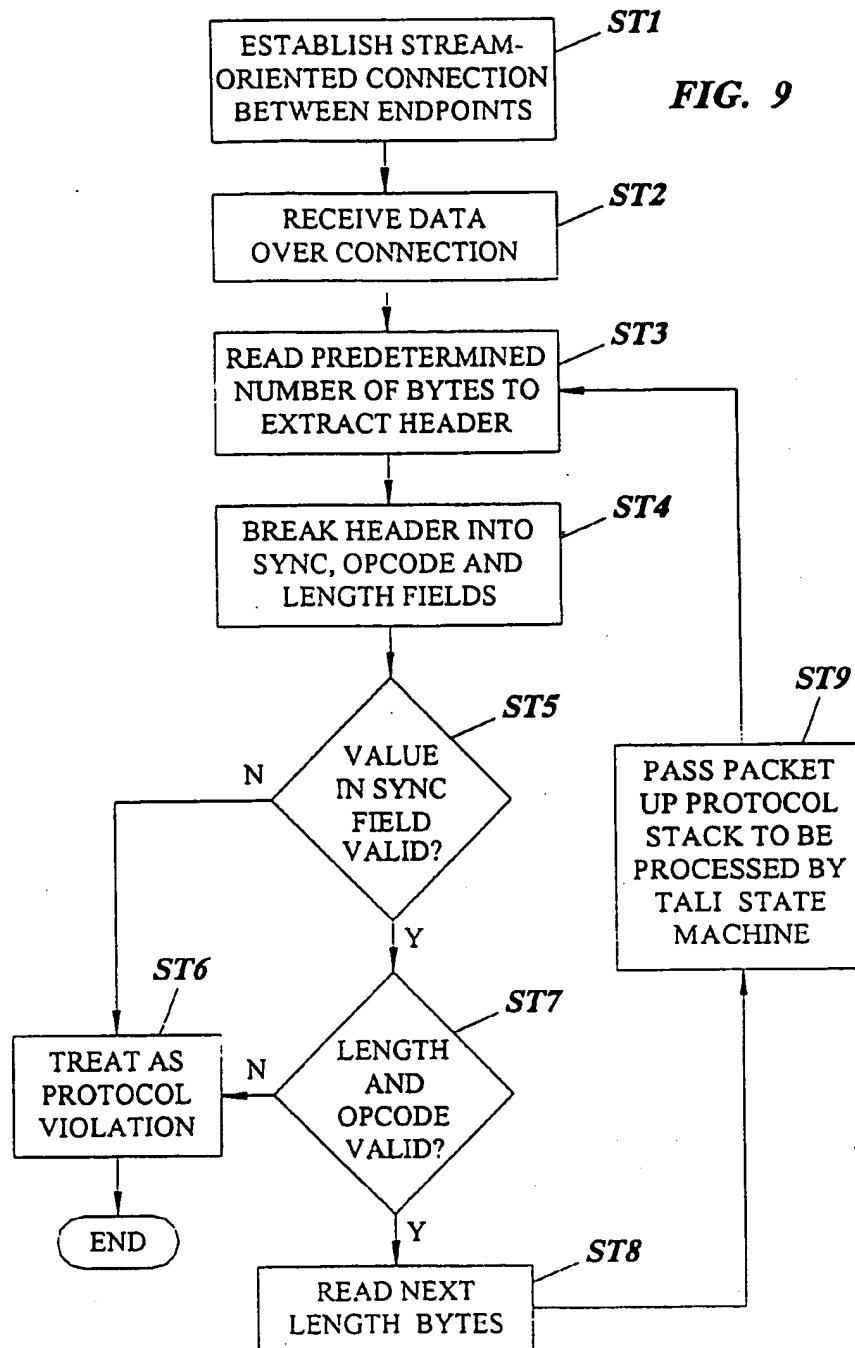
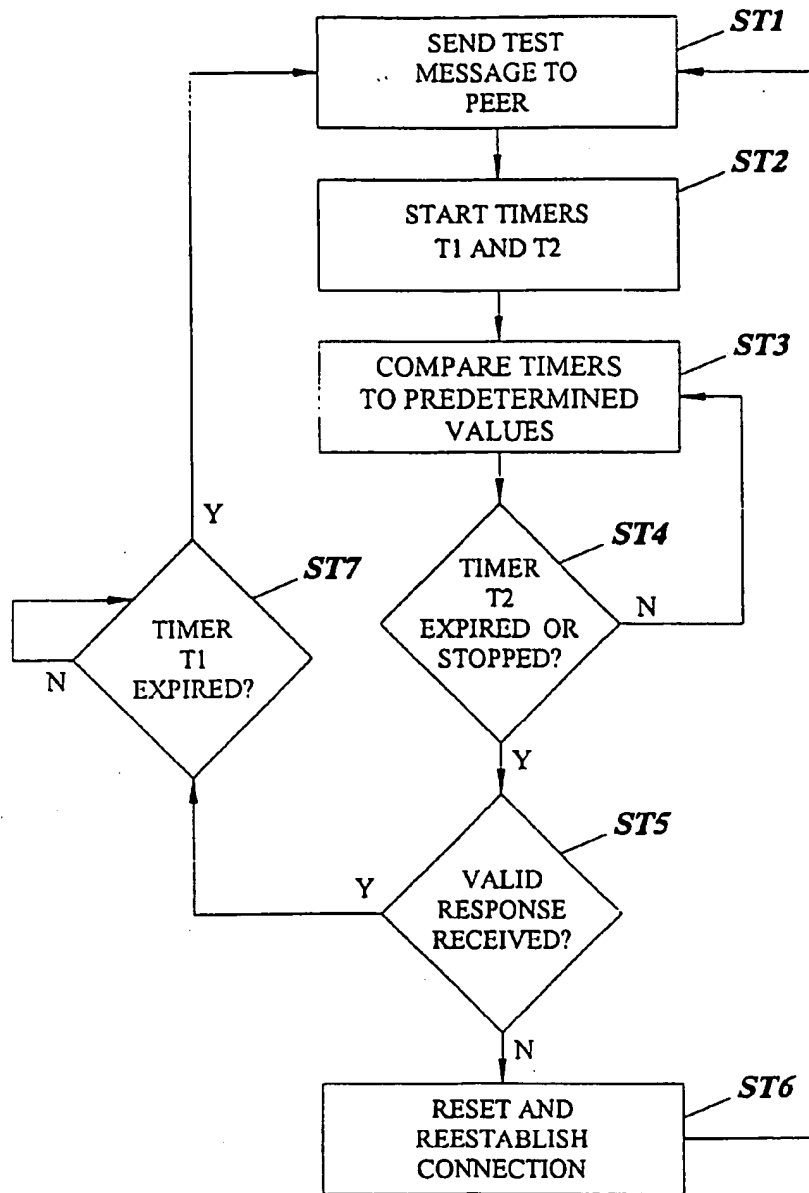


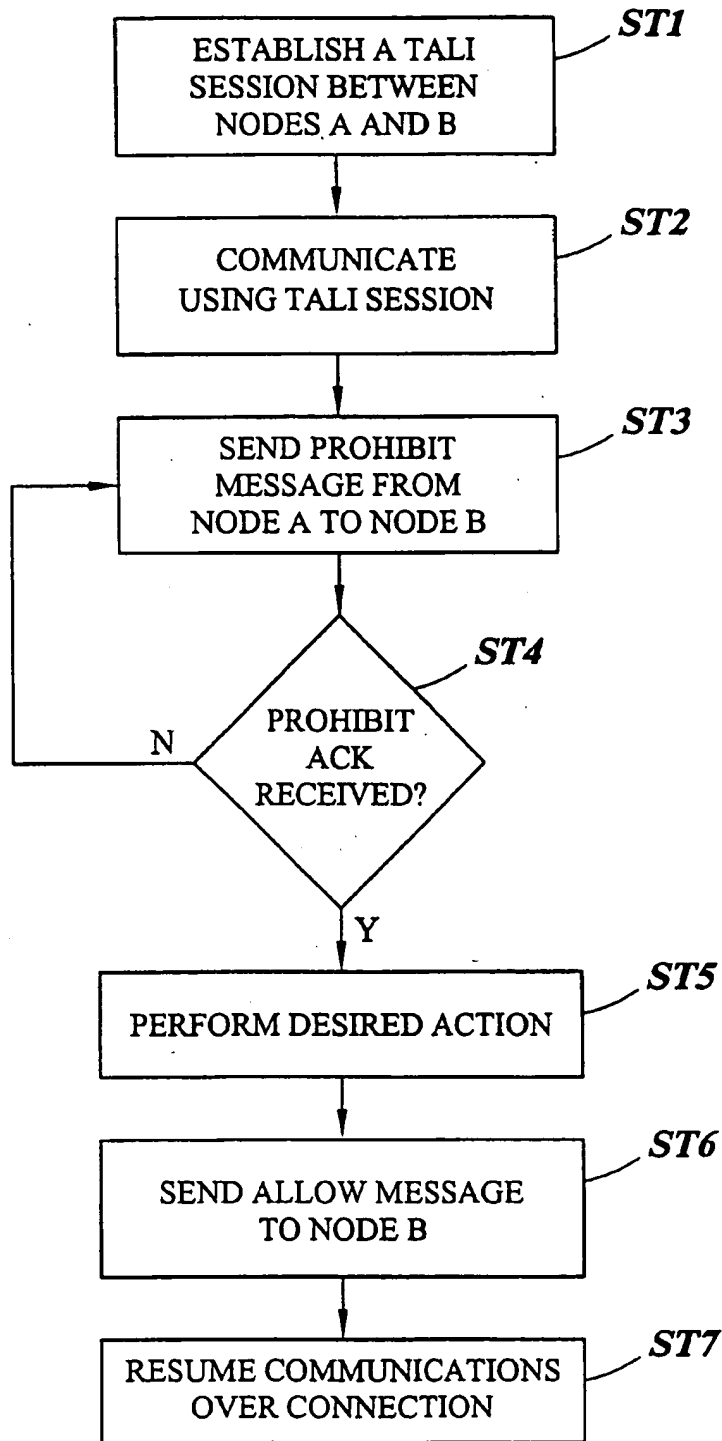
FIG. 8

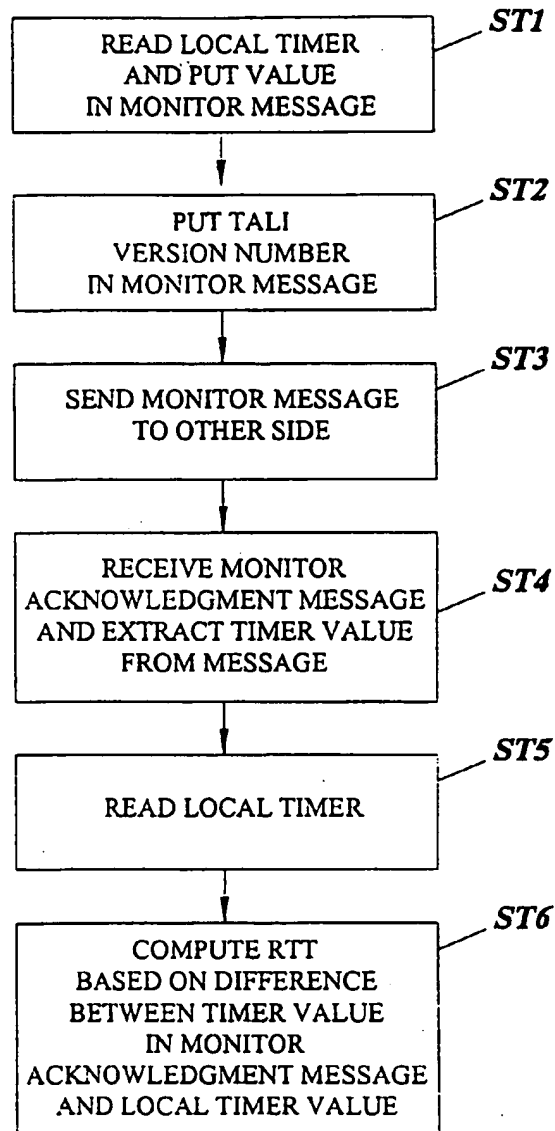
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FIG. 9



**11/13****FIG. 10**

**12/13****FIG. 11**

**13/13****FIG. 12**

## INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.  
PCT/US00/15561

<b>A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER</b> IPC(7) : H04L 12/28, 12/56 US CL : 370/410, 392 According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC														
<b>B. FIELDS SEARCHED</b> Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols) U.S. : 370/410,392,351,352,384,385,389,396-400 Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)														
<b>C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT</b>														
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No												
A,P	US 6,021,126 A (WHITE ET AL) 01 FEBRUARY 2000, see entire reference.	1-91												
A,E	US 6,075,783 A (VOIT) 13 JUNE 2000, see fig.4.	1-91												
A,E	US 6,079,036 A (MOHARRAM) 20 JUNE 2000, see fig.11.	1-91												
A,P	US 6,064,653 A (FARRIS) 16 MAY 2000, see entire reference.	1-91												
A,P	US 6,069,890 A (WHITE ET AL) 30 MAY 2000, see fig.2	1-91												
<input type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. <input type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex.														
<table border="0"> <tr> <td>* Special categories of cited documents:</td> <td>*T* later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention</td> </tr> <tr> <td>*A* document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance</td> <td>*N* document of particular relevance, the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone</td> </tr> <tr> <td>*E* earlier document published on or after the international filing date</td> <td>*Y* document of particular relevance, the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art</td> </tr> <tr> <td>*L* document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)</td> <td>*X* document member of the same patent family</td> </tr> <tr> <td>*O* document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>*P* document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>			* Special categories of cited documents:	*T* later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention	*A* document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	*N* document of particular relevance, the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone	*E* earlier document published on or after the international filing date	*Y* document of particular relevance, the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art	*L* document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	*X* document member of the same patent family	*O* document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means		*P* document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	
* Special categories of cited documents:	*T* later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention													
*A* document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	*N* document of particular relevance, the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone													
*E* earlier document published on or after the international filing date	*Y* document of particular relevance, the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art													
*L* document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	*X* document member of the same patent family													
*O* document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means														
*P* document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed														
Date of the actual completion of the international search 12 JULY 2000		Date of mailing of the international search report 02 AUG 2000												
Name and mailing address of the ISA/US Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks Box PCT Washington, D.C. 20231 Facsimile No. (703) 305-3230		Authorized officer AJIT PATEL <i>James R. Matthews</i> Telephone No. (703) 305-3900												